

## Congressional Closeup by Kathleen Klenetsky

### Barton introduces oil import-fee bill

Texas Republican Rep. Joe Barton introduced legislation Nov. 10 to impose an oil import fee. In remarks on the floor of the House, Barton counterposed his bill to current proposals for a gasoline excise tax, arguing that it would not only produce additional revenues for the U.S. treasury, but would have a number of positive benefits, among them, salvaging the hard-hit domestic oil and gas industry.

As opposed to a gasoline excise tax, an oil import fee would create energy-related jobs, and "would actually provide some incentive for domestic oil and gas production, estimates ranging from a half-million barrels a day to a million-and-a-half barrels per day of oil produced in this country."

Barton's bill sets a target price for oil at \$25 per crude barrel and \$28 per refined barrel. The fee would be the difference between the target price and the market price, and would be paid by petroleum companies that import oil.

Given today's market price of approximately \$19 per barrel for crude, Barton estimated that his bill would yield between \$9 and \$12 billion annually. Three-quarters of this sum would be used for deficit reduction; the other quarter would be allocated to purchase stripper well oil to put in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

### Senate defeats housing bill

Hysteria over the budget deficit took its toll on a comprehensive housing

and community development bill Nov. 17, when the Senate rejected, at least temporarily, the two-year, \$30 billion measure.

The bill went down to defeat over the issue of whether to waive budget limits set forth in a resolution earlier this year.

Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), the measure's chief sponsor, charged that "people were too sensitive about being charged with budget busting," and that many who had supported the bill previously "were reluctant to vote to waive the budget act" in the current budget-slashing climate.

The bill was the first explicit housing authorization measure to reach the Senate floor in seven years. During that time, spending on housing assistance programs, which make up about half of the monies authorized by the Cranston bill, had shrunk 70%, at the same time that hundreds of thousands of low-income people have been forced to live in the streets because they could not find affordable housing.

Among its many provisions, the bill would have provided housing assistance, either through construction and rehabilitation programs, or through rent subsidies, for approximately 85,000 additional homeless families.

### Rotten compromise on the SDI

Just weeks before Mikhail Gorbachov was to arrive in Washington, the Reagan administration struck a rotten compromise with Congress which will put the country's strategic defense program in a straitjacket.

Specifically, the administration has

agreed to abide by the so-called narrow reading of the ABM Treaty for another year, and to curtail its breakout from the unratified SALT II agreement. President Reagan has thus reneged on two of his more significant achievements: his jettisoning of SALT II, and his rejection of the fraud—perpetrated by the arms-control lobby and Moscow—that a restrictive reading of the ABM Treaty exists.

The deal, worked out by incoming Pentagon chief Frank Carlucci and key senators, among them Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), was made in the context of the FY88 military authorization bill, which had been held up for months because of a dispute between the President and Congress over these and several related issues. Both houses of Congress had written language into the bill which would have forced the United States to comply with SALT II and the restrictive interpretation of ABM indefinitely. In addition, the bill contained killing restrictions on the U.S. anti-satellite (ASAT) program.

The President had vowed to veto any bill containing these provisions. But his desire to play footsy with Mikhail Gorbachov apparently got the better of him, and, on the same day that he bid a formal farewell to the staunchly anti-compromise Cap Weinberger, Reagan sold out.

Under the terms of the deal, SDI funds for FY88 can be used only for tests consistent with the narrow reading of the treaty. This means that the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization will have to cancel a whole series of tests scheduled for this year, among them THOR, a series of tests combining space-based sensors and interceptor rockets, and the Post-Boost Tracking and Lethality Test, which

would have used space-based radar and interceptors to destroy warheads from submarine-launched missiles.

The compromise bill allocates only \$3.9 billion to the SDI—down almost \$2 billion from the administration's original request; and prohibits the Pentagon from buying hardware that could be used in future years for tests that would not be allowed under the narrow reading of the treaty; the Defense Department had sought such funds.

In addition, although the administration refused to abide by SALT II sublimits, it did agree to retire a Poseidon submarine whose deployment surpassed those limits. The compromise legislation also would extend a ban on ASAT testing.

The deal got rave reviews from the arms-control mafia. James Rubin, of the Arms Control Association, called the deal a "positive package" for arms control. "It keeps ABM in full force and good spirits." Self-styled defense maven Sam Nunn crowed that it "fully preserves the prerogatives of the Congress to control the power of the purse."

One can be sure that Moscow is even happier. Even the *New York Times* was forced to concede that some U.S. experts believe the Russians "may feel more confident about moving toward a strategic arms treaty now that they see that Congress has temporarily moved to block the Reagan administration from acting on its own interpretation" of the ABM Treaty.

The bill, which President Reagan has said he would veto, may soon be brought up on the Senate floor again. But even if it passes, it is unlikely that Cranston could get the 67 votes necessary to overturn a presidential veto.

## Gorbachov was almost to address Congress!

The American population came close to being treated to a truly awesome spectacle in December: Mikhail Gorbachov almost became the first Soviet leader to address the Congress of the United States.

Backed by Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) and House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.), President Reagan invited the Soviet dictator to speak to Congress when he comes to Washington for the Dec. 7 summit.

But at the proverbial last minute, after the magnitude of the blunder in according such an honor to the principal representative of the nation's principal enemy, had sunk in with more and more members of the Congress and the administration, the idea was scuttled and the invitation to Gorbachov, reportedly, was officially withdrawn.

Almost immediately, the proposal had touched off a raging controversy, especially among conservative Republicans in Congress, who were shocked that President Reagan would even consider issuing such an invitation.

Several members of Congress, including Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who threatened to filibuster the proposal, objected on the grounds that addressing Congress "is an honor that is normally reserved for our allies, and not our adversaries."

Then, at least 75 members of the House, including the second- and third-ranking Republicans, fired off a letter to the President Nov. 18, expressing their violent opposition to the Gorbachov address.

"The leader of a totalitarian state should not be accorded the same stature as Winston Churchill at the heart of American democracy," said Rep. Robert Walker (R-Pa.) author of the letter. Rep. Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.) called the proposal a "scandalous travesty," and Wyoming Rep. Richard Cheney, who chairs the House Republican Conference, said he had told Secretary of State George Shultz that most Republican members felt that the invitation was a "high honor that should not be extended to the head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."

At first, neither the White House, nor the Democratic leadership, gave any signs of rescinding the invitation. But then, the matter was either apparently taken up during the Nov. 20 "budget summit" session, or just after it. Rep. Bob Michel, ranking Republican in the House, and Sen. Robert Dole, the ranking Republican in the Senate, emerged to indicate that Gorbachov would not address the Congress after all.

Michel said firmly that Gorbachov would not be invited, while Dole was less decisive, but said he doubted that Gorbachov would address Congress during his trip. The *Washington Times* had reported earlier that day, "Republicans opposed to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov's addressing Congress were on the verge of victory yesterday [Nov. 19], as leaders from both sides of the aisle joined the opposition and the White House scrambled to distance itself from the idea."

As *EIR* went to press, the White House had reportedly made it official. The nation's chief enemy would not be accorded an invitation that is one of the nation's chief honors.