

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

House slashes defense spending for fiscal 1989

The House approved a \$282.6 billion defense bill by a vote of 360-53, effectively cutting the current budget by as much as 10% in real terms. The bill cuts the SDI budget to \$2.5 billion, while providing more money for drug interdiction, and transfers \$60 million of the Navy's funds to the Coast Guard. The legislation would give the Pentagon \$556.6 million less than the amount requested by the Reagan administration.

The bill funds all Pentagon operations for the year beginning Oct. 1 except military construction projects, civil defense, and nuclear warheads, which are covered by other legislation. A similar spending bill is now pending in the Senate.

There was unusually little conflict in the debate on the bill compared to previous years. Rather, the real battle over arms-control provisions is being waged in the debate surrounding Pentagon authorization proposals, currently being considered by a House-Senate conference committee.

Congress moves to scrap three nuclear subs

House and Senate conferees, working on the Pentagon spending bill, have decided to scrap three nuclear missile-carrying submarines to keep the United States near the limits of the defunct SALT II arms treaty. The agreement is one of several compromises that lawmakers have made on arms control issues to reconcile House and Senate versions of the Fiscal Year 1989 Defense Authorization Bill.

The three submarines that would be destroyed by the bill are the USS

Daniel Webster, the USS Henry Clay, and the USS James Monroe. They would be dismantled during scheduled overhauls. Each submarine holds 16 Poseidon missiles capable of carrying 1 to 10 warheads.

Other elements of the bill, on which the conference committee is said to be approaching agreement are:

- Eliminating a measure in the House version which would ban all but the smallest U.S. nuclear tests. This measure would have allowed only tests with a force of one kiloton or less. The Senate was opposed to this measure. The conferees have similarly dropped a House provision that would bar the United States from testing "depressed trajectory" nuclear missiles, which reach their targets more quickly by flying on a flattened course rather than an arc.

- One rather devastating provision of the compromise bill would prohibit the Reagan administration, for the second year in a row, from conducting Strategic Defense Initiative tests that fall outside the traditional interpretation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty.

Drought brings reality home to Capitol Hill

"Whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad," goes the saying. Well, economic madness has reigned for some time on Capitol Hill, with austerity policies already wreaking havoc throughout the land. But now, the destruction is about to descend upon us in the form of the worst food crisis in this country's history. If the madness does not cease quickly, the *Götterdämmerung* will be upon this nation—with no hope of return.

The drought has had a very sobering effect on those who realize the dimensions of the crisis—legislators from farm states. "We will find out in the next couple weeks if the real severe damage, the total economic disaster that we fear, is going to unfold," said Rep. Vin Weber (R-Minn.) on the House floor on June 16, "when we find out if we get enough rainfall to bring the soybean crop and the corn crop to maturation."

Although weather conditions, which may appear to fall under the category, "Acts of God," may have been the immediate cause of the present dilemma, the policy of the Reagan administration (and previous administrations for that matter) created the pre-conditions for these weather conditions, and the fact that they have led to disaster. Rep. Jamie Whitten (D-Miss.), chairman of the Agriculture subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, indicated some of these preconditions:

"May I point out that in eight years, 261,000 farmers have gone broke, hundreds have committed suicide. The farmers are the only group in the world that was told by the government they had to pay in one year everything they owed. This occurred even though the government caused their financial problems by withholding the farmers' commodities from the world markets and by using the PIK program. Under PIK, we reduced 11% of our production while our competitors overseas increased their production by 11%."

The government has been playing down the extent of the crisis, although this is getting progressively more difficult to do. The House had passed an agricultural bill which included a major reduction in reimbursement for losses by the Commodity Credit Corp., the agency that administers price and

income-support payments to farmers. Spending in the measure is \$12 billion less than current levels and \$2.5 billion less than the Reagan administration had requested.

A bipartisan congressional task force has been set up to deal with the drought. Although Senate Agriculture Committee chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) has rejected any form of major water or irrigation project to help resolve the situation, there is hopefully enough pro-farmer sentiment on the congressional task force set up to deal with the drought, to begin taking the required measures. It is obvious, however, that the austerity measures of the U.S. political establishment and the survival of the U.S. population are now mutually opposed. One of them has got to go.

Chappell adamantly denies any wrongdoing

In the face of a politically motivated FBI "fishing expedition," rumors are spreading that several congressmen may be implicated in Pentagate, among them Florida Democrat Bill Chappell. U.S. Attorney Henry Hudson has assured legislators that no Capitol Hill people are involved, although information is being "leaked" from the Justice Department, indicating that legislators will be the next targets of Hudson's "great purge."

Many are being intimidated by the Gestapo-like tactics of the Hudson-led investigation, but others, like Rep. Chappell, are starting to fight back.

Chappell, chairman of the House Defense Appropriations subcommittee, was formerly Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives. In his capacity as subcommittee chairman, he has naturally played a role in the

consideration of weapons systems. Chappell called any insinuations of wrongdoing in his capacity as subcommittee chairman "bunk," pointing to the fact that this is an election year, and all kinds of wild accusations are being thrown around in order to silence political opponents.

After the Pentagate operation broke in the media, several newspapers reported that Representative Chappell's name had come up in conversations overheard in a wiretap placed on the phone of Charles Gardner, a former vice president of Unisys, one of the firms which had been served with a search warrant in connection with the FBI sweep. "I have had conversations with Gardner in this office, as I have with most of the top contracting people in the country," said Chappell. "But I'm not interested in who gets a contract. I'm interested in finding the programs that will do the job and let the Pentagon come back and tell us which way they think we should go."

Congressmen hit by election year mudslide

It is not only the Pentagate scandal which is about to erupt in what promises to be the bloodiest and dirtiest political election campaign of the century. Doubts concerning the ethical conduct of numerous congressmen are now being circulated in what promises to make the "Great Purges" of Joseph Stalin look like a tea party.

One of the issues being raised is whether congressmen receiving a considerable amount of their campaign funding from political action committee (PAC) contributions are not being unduly influenced in their political decision-making. A recent book by a

former Capitol Hill aide, called, *The Best Congress Money Can Buy*, which is becoming something of an "in" book in Washington these days, says that Congress is permeated by "legalized corruption" involving honorariums and appearance fees.

It is undoubtedly the case that many such improprieties are rampant on Capitol Hill. But, as in the case of Pentagate, there is a distinct smell that the "scandals" are politically motivated—and not for reasons of mere partisan politics. In spite of the many moral flaws of a good number of our elected representatives, their sensitivity to their constituents makes them something of an institutional opposition to the type of austerity policies which are being promoted by the political elites in this country. The wave of scandals about to hit Congress seems to be primarily aimed at Watergating any opposition to such policies. The country is in the process of being shoved down the tubes, politically and economically—and anyone who dares oppose that process is looking for trouble. Such are the conclusions meant to be drawn by the congressional "scandals in the wings" now taking form.

Senate committee sabotages space station

The Senate Appropriations subcommittee held the budget for the space station to \$200 million. NASA had requested \$967 million. The funds are designed to last until January 1989.

At that time, the new administration will have to determine whether to continue support for the project, which NASA officials have said, at this level of funding, would probably be better abandoned.