

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Congress to close down military bases

The Congress has prepared the way for shutting two dozen U.S. military bases as part of a program of austerity cuts in the defense budget. Because the issue is a sensitive item for those members of Congress in whose districts those bases are situated, the Congress worked out a round-about procedure for dealing with the problem, which sharply reduces congressional participation in the process.

"There is something in the heart of every politician that loves a dam or a harbor or a military installation," laments Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), who has become something of an Attila the Hun when it comes to cutting budget deficits.

The bill was approved 82-7 in the Senate and 370-31 in the House.

Under the legislation, which President Reagan is expected to sign, a 12-member commission appointed by Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci will have until Dec. 31 to present a list of recommendations for bases that should be closed or reduced in size. If the secretary accepts the recommendations, he must submit them to Congress by Jan. 16. Congress would then have until mid-April to overturn the recommendation, by passing a resolution of disapproval. To discourage congressional meddling, the resolution would permit only the rejection of the entire list and would be subject to a presidential veto.

Rep. Dick Armey (R-Tex.), who helped write the base-closing legislation and guide it to passage in the House, said the "beauty" of the bill is that it protects individual members of Congress from political punishment at home and from political intimidation

by the administration. The inconvenient influence of constituency pressure is thereby eliminated from the legislative process!

### Senate backs compromise on sanctions against Iraq

The Senate approved on Oct. 11 legislation designed to curb Iraq's alleged use of chemical weapons against its Kurdish minority. The legislation, approved 87-0, would bar export of weapons and sensitive technology to Iraq and require the United States to oppose loans to Iraq by international financial institutions.

Other sanctions, including denial of export-import credits, restrictions on imports and exports between Iraq and the United States, and a downgrading of U.S. diplomatic relations with Iraq, which would have been mandatory in an earlier, tougher Senate bill, would, in this bill, be left to the discretion of the President, who could disregard them if Iraq provided verifiable assurances that it is not using poison gas or planning to do so.

Sen. John Heinz (R-Pa.) warned that the bill has "deep flaws" and could wind up hurting U.S. businesses more than Iraq, which could then turn to other countries for weapons and sensitive technology.

### Hearings arranged to approve new SDI director

At the urging of the administration, the Senate Armed Services Committee held a hastily arranged hearing to consider the appointment of Lt. Gen. George L. Monahan, Jr. as new director of the Strategic Defense Initiative

Organization. At 5:00 p.m. on Oct. 11, Pentagon officials were informed of the following day's confirmation hearings.

The nomination of Monahan to the post was seen as being supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who have been cool in their support for SDI, as they felt it took money from more traditional military projects. Some senators wanted to see the SDI put into the hands of a civilian, and thus transferred from Pentagon control.

Under pressure from hostile legislators and a dwindling defense budget, supporters of the SDI have gone more and more on the defensive. The resignation of Lt. Gen. James Abrahamson as SDIO chief may have been conditioned by the fact that the original "total shield" concept of the SDI had been virtually abandoned by some of the leading proponents of the SDI.

During the hearings, Sen. James Exon (D-Neb.) questioned General Monahan as to whether it would be possible to craft an impenetrable shield against Soviet nuclear-tipped missiles. "We have to go through many, many decisions yet before we know exactly where the SDI program is going to go," said Monahan. He pledged that he would be a provider of technical facts and cost data about SDI, rather than an advocate for the program, as some in Congress have accused General Abrahamson of being.

Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci commented in a speech in Anaheim, California on Oct. 12, "Even a partial strategic defense system would be a great improvement, in terms of strengthening nuclear deterrence. What even a partially effective SDI can do, is to put a very large question mark in the mind of the planner considering a first strike."

It is expected that the nomination of General Monahan will be approved before the Congress adjourns.

## **D**rug bill debate focuses on death penalty

The Senate on Oct. 13 defeated numerous attempts to eliminate the controversial death penalty from the drug bill now under consideration. Three amendments were submitted to replace or to place limitations on the death penalty clause.

The bill states that the death penalty would be allowed for major drug operators who intentionally or recklessly kill or order killings, or for others, such as hired killers, who commit murder as part of a continuing drug enterprise. The death penalty would also apply to anyone who kills a law enforcement officer while committing a drug-related felony.

The Senate approved civil penalties of up to \$10,000 for possession of any amount of illegal drugs intended for personal use.

## **P**roxmire tries again for a new banking bill

As the 100th Congress draws to a close, Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wisc.) made an 11th-hour attempt to try to pass banking legislation that would expand banks' securities powers into corporate debt, and ultimately, corporate equities. Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) had agreed to let Proxmire take his bill to the floor on the night of Oct. 11. Byrd later reneged, in the face of threatened delays from Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), the chief defender of the securities industry in the Senate.

Similar legislation has been tied up in the House because of jurisdictional battles between the House Banking Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which has responsibility for the securities industry.

As it is so late in the session, however, there is little chance that such legislation will be taken up by the 100th Congress.

## **S**anctions take toll on South African blacks

On Oct. 13, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) issued a report analyzing data for the first nine months of 1987, and found that South Africa's major exports to the United States had fallen \$417 million from the same period last year. The total decrease in South African sales abroad was put at \$469 million.

South African government figures, released at the same time, show that the various boycotts, lending restrictions, and other economic punishment imposed by the international community have helped limit South Africa's economic growth between 1980 and 1987 to 0.4%.

The stagnation in growth has already taken its toll on the living standards of South Africans, hitting the poorest sections of the population—the blacks—the hardest.

But not only South Africa is hurt by the boycott. The other states of southern and central Africa that rely on the mining and industrial potential of the South African economy have also been affected.

The supposed intent of the sanctions was to force the South African government to eliminate the apartheid system more rapidly. The net effect of

the sanctions has, however, been to undermine the limited reforms of the Botha government and to strengthen the right-wing opposition to Botha within South Africa, threatening a racist backlash in that country.

## **C**ongress passes \$1 billion AIDS package

The AIDS Federal Policy Act was approved by Congress on Oct. 13, but without the controversial confidentiality clause which had been attached to the bill. The original bill, initiated by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), would have imposed, under the rubric of confidentiality, stiff fines of up to \$10,000 on anyone who revealed that another person was a carrier of the deadly virus. It was because of this provision, and the lack of even moderate stipulations that would have required mandatory testing, that the bill had been opposed by a handful of conservative Republican congressmen.

When the bill was passed by the House, it was then to be sent to conference committee to be reconciled with the Senate AIDS bill. Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) blocked appointment of a conference committee in the Senate by threatening a filibuster. After dropping the provisions for confidentiality, Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) introduced a new version of the bill, which was passed by voice vote.

The legislation calls for adding at least 780 full-time employees to the Public Health Service for AIDS research in the coming fiscal year. The bill authorizes \$600 million in funding for research, and \$100 million to be spent on home health care for people infected with HIV. \$100 million will go to education, and \$100 million will be spent for anonymous testing.