

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Senators try new tack on Brazilian rain forest

A U.S. Senate delegation traveled to Brazil on April 1, evidently to try to repair some of the damage that has been done by recent U.S. pressures on Brazil to cede sovereignty over the Amazon River basin, in the interests of "environmental protection."

Congress is debating legislation that would penalize Brazil if it does not give in to the environmentalist pressures and place the Amazon under international jurisdiction.

President José Sarney has emphasized that he will permit no violation of Brazilian sovereignty for the sake of the environmentalist cause. This was his response to a previous Senate delegation led by Sen. Timothy Wirth (D-Colo). That "fact-finding mission" in January was seen in Rio as an intrusion by the United States. Remarks widely attributed to Sen. Robert Kasten (R-Wisc.), that the Amazon belongs to the world rather than to Brazil because of its ecological importance, further infuriated Brazilians.

The latest "fact-finding mission," led by Sen. John Chafee (R-R.I.), is treading a bit more softly, apparently with the aim of convincing the Brazilians that the aggressive tone of the recent environmental debate in the Congress is not ill-intended. The delegation included Sen. Steve Symms (R-Id.), Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), and Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.). Accompanying the delegation were staffers from the Committee on the Environment and Public Works.

The Chafee delegation received a somewhat better reception than the previous one, although tensions are still high. President Sarney and Deputy Minister Tarso stressed in meetings with the senators that there is room for international cooperation in the

Amazon, provided it comes under Brazilian jurisdiction and with no strings attached.

The issue of the rain forest is also being used to encourage debt-for-nature swaps, which would allow the banks to buy the Brazilian patrimony dirt-cheap. President Sarney rejected such a notion, when he presented the Brazilian plan for the Amazon region on April 6. "We accept international help," said Sarney, "but we cannot accept conditions. The Amazon is ours." He attacked "great powers or international organizations . . . that would come to dictate to us how to defend what is ours to defend." Sarney said that "conditional" aid was unacceptable, because restrictions on the intelligent use of the Amazon would only further "that most abject of all pollutions, the pollution of poverty."

Mayor Barry seeks federal aid for D.C.

Washington, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, under Senate criticism that he was resisting offers of help to combat drugs and violence, released a formal request on April 6 for \$102 million in federal aid to hire 800 more police officers, expand prison space, and fund drug prevention programs.

The District of Columbia, hard hit by drugs, crime, and the economic crisis, is being targeted for a federal takeover that would replace the local political machine with a bureaucratic dictatorship responsible to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Mayor Barry, whose government has been plagued by numerous corruption scandals, is to be axed in the process and the machine dismantled.

The immediate pretext for federal intervention is the drug problem. Barry has refused to allow the use of the D.C. National Guard in fighting drugs, although many in the Congress have been pressuring him to do that. The commanding general of the D.C. National Guard, Calvin Franklin, has been appointed by President Bush to become the new head of FEMA.

In related action in the House, Rep. Stan Parris (R-Va.) has put forward legislation that would place portions of the city services, including law enforcement, under the purview of the federal government, effectively rescinding its limited home rule.

Coleman says Brady Plan is not enough

With hearings under way on the Brady Plan for debt reduction in the House Banking Committee, a Sense of the Congress Resolution on Mexican debt and the Brady Plan was introduced by Rep. Ron Coleman (D-Tex.) urging President Bush to encourage private commercial banks in the United States to reduce the debt and debt service costs from Mexico. The resolution urges the President to encourage banks to act by the middle of July, when that country's austerity program expires.

Coleman and other sponsors of the resolution realize that if something is not done quickly to alleviate the debt situation, Mexico could blow up. Mexico's government, if pushed against the wall, could be in serious trouble, regardless of their willingness to enforce austerity.

"If our new government wants to form a long-lasting and meaningful partnership with the new Salinas government in Mexico," says Coleman, "we need to permit some breathing

room for that nation to negotiate with the other internal factions, in what should be described, despite the charges of Mexico-bashers in Washington, as a pluralist system.”

Bush education bill introduced in House

The Educational Excellence Act of 1989 was introduced for discussion and passage in the House of Representatives on April 5.

Rep. Jim Jontz (D-Ind.) was critical of the program, referring to discussions he had had with local educators in Indiana and Ohio, who said that the “President’s proposed budget does not match his rhetoric; cuts in important programs would result from the President’s budget at a time when we need to be expanding them, and educators would prefer to see existing successful programs like [those for] handicapped and vocational education properly funded, rather than money drained from these programs to pay for the President’s initiatives.”

Wright investigation seems to be losing steam

A number of charges raised against House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.) have been dropped, narrowing the focus of the investigation. The charges involve his alleged intervention with federal banking regulators on behalf of distressed Texas savings and loan associations, his intercession with government officials on behalf of a Texas oil and gas company, and his alleged use of a staff aide on government time to compile parts of his book, *Reflections of a Public Man*.

The 12-man ethics committee is still wrestling with the question of whether a longtime Wright friend and business associate, Fort Worth developer George Mallick, had a direct enough interest in legislation to conclude that Wright broke House rules in accepting gifts from him. The ethics committee’s special counsel, Richard J. Phelan, has argued that Wright and his wife received substantial gifts from Mallick, including use of a Fort Worth condominium and a Cadillac provided to Wright’s wife. A related issue involves a loan to Mrs. Wright from Mallightco, an investment firm owned by Mallick, Wright, and their wives.

The campaign against Wright was initiated by the newly elected House Republican Whip Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.). The Republicans had hoped to make the Wright case into a media sensation, as a Democratic revenge for the press campaign against John Tower. Gingrich is still forecasting findings which will be “devastating” for Wright as a result of the committee’s investigations.

Grain inspector debunks aflatoxin scare

In testimony before a House subcommittee on April 5, W. Kirk Miller, the head of the Federal Grain Inspection Service, said that the campaign against aflatoxin was “management by media hysteria” and that the Grain Inspection Service “had not seen a problem.”

Aflatoxin is a natural substance produced by a mold that grows on stored grain and is believed by some to cause liver cancer when eaten at low doses over a lifetime. Guidelines have been set regarding the levels of aflatoxin permitted, and corn that contains dangerous levels of aflatoxin may

be mixed with clean corn, thereby bringing the average contamination level below the guideline.

Because of the higher demands placed on foreign buyers, corn sold abroad is subject to more rigorous testing. Consumer rights groups are making a big issue out of the aflatoxin question, demanding penalties for mixing “contaminated” food with clean food. In tests conducted last fall, only 6 out of 263 samples, or 2% were found higher than 20 parts per billion.

Submarine warfare lag alarms experts

The House Armed Services Committee released a report on March 21 which reports that Soviet advances in quieting submarines are heralding “a sea change in sea warfare” which is threatening the ability of the United States to protect sea lanes, maintain carrier task forces, and “to operate beyond her shores.”

Prepared by a panel of 10 experts, including Vice Admiral Edward Burkhalter (ret.) and Dr. Lowell Wood, the report calls for increased funding of anti-submarine warfare (ASW) research. “The importance of this research justifies significant real growth in funding in spite of today’s downward pressure on the defense budget,” the report states.

The magnitude of the research task involved is so great that the report calls for a “realignment of authority over the Navy program and budget” to ensure that adequate funds are channeled into the ASW effort, i.e., a reorganization of the Navy. As a research effort, the report notes that ASW is second only to the Strategic Defense Initiative in terms of the extent of the challenge faced.