

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Congress wary of scrapping military planes

The Bush proposal to scrap military aircraft worth billions of dollars has raised eyebrows on Capitol Hill and could jeopardize funding for a planned transfer of U.S. F-16 fighter-bombers to a new base in Italy.

The Bush proposal would require the destruction of roughly 750 combat and training aircraft deployed in Western Europe. According to the *Washington Post*, several legislators said that moves to scrap such expensive hardware so soon would raise questions about spending up to \$500 million for construction of a new base near Cretone, Italy, where 72 U.S. Air Force F-16 fighter-bombers are due to be transferred from Torrejón, in Spain. Italy agreed in 1988 to ease a NATO dispute by accepting the jets after the Spanish government insisted that they be withdrawn.

Rep. Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.), chairwoman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities, commented, "Politically, it's almost impossible to build more bases when we're going to downscale the ones that are there," because of the new arms control proposal. Pro-defense congressmen, who have been fighting an uphill battle against the disarmament types like Schroeder, have had the rug pulled out from under them by the Bush proposals.

### Rangel attacks delay in fight against drugs

Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) criticized President Bush's war on drugs, saying that the administration has "dropped their arms and their guns" in

the drug war while National Coordinator of the Office of Drug Abuse Policy, William J. Bennett, takes six months to draft federal strategy.

The six-month timetable was set by Congress when it passed the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act. Rangel says that this should not be an excuse for the administration to not develop or pursue new initiatives at a time when the drug crisis was "overwhelming state and local government and paralyzing the criminal justice system."

The Bush administration has missed deadlines for two important reports which it was mandated to submit to Congress. One report due May 1, is supposed to detail how federal agencies plan to implement the "user accountability" sections of the law mandating the denial of federal benefits, such as loans, contracts, and professional licenses to convicted drug offenders. Bennett had informed the House and Senate Judiciary Committees in mid-April that he needed more time to complete the user accountability report.

The State Department also missed a May 18 deadline to report on a strategy for combatting the cocaine trade in source countries in Ibero-America. A State Department spokeswoman said the last week of May that the report would be included in Bennett's strategy when it is released in September.

### House Democrats jockey for top posts

With the resignation of House Democratic Party Whip Tony Coelho (D-Calif.) and Jim Wright's announcement on May 31 that he will be leaving both his Speaker's position and his House seat, House Democrats are

jockeying to fill these important posts.

Rep. Tom Foley (D-Wash.) is considered a shoe-in for the speaker's post, while Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) is the frontrunner for the House Democratic Whip post. Several other Democratic congressmen being targeted for "ethics investigations," including powerful black Philadelphia Democrat Rep. William Gray III, who was also deemed a contender for the post, leaves the outcome uncertain. Another Whip candidate is liberal Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), the author of an AIDS bill chiefly crafted to protect "gay" rights rather than to prevent the spread of AIDS.

### Senate tries to put the screws on Noriega

The Senate on June 1 said it would refuse to confirm the appointment of a Panamanian administrator for the Panama Canal next year if the country remains under the control of Gen. Manuel Noriega.

As a step in the process by which Panama will gradually take over the administration of the Panama Canal, the canal treaties provide that, as of Jan. 1, 1990, a Panamanian national be chosen to replace the U.S. administrator of the canal. The Sense of the Senate resolution passed 63-31, but lacks the force of law. It warns the President against forwarding appointment of a new canal administrator to the Senate unless he can certify that the Panamanian government has been "democratically elected" under constitutional requirements for civilian control of the military.

Although the resolution says that it does not seek to abrogate the treaties negotiated in 1977, it makes clear that

it would not confirm any nominee appointed by a Panamanian government while Noriega is still army chief. The State Department warned that it would be "unwise to send any signal now that would raise questions concerning U.S. compliance with its treaty obligations."

## **C**ongressmen slam DoJ for Gray office probe

Several congressmen have sharply criticized the Department of Justice for its handling of an FBI preliminary criminal investigation into personnel practices in the office of Rep. William H. Gray III (D-Pa.), the fourth-ranking House Democrat, which became known because of a CBS News report based on leaks from the Justice Department.

In a hastily convened late-night news conference on May 30, Gray said the CBS News report that the FBI was probing his "financial dealings" was an "outrageous lie." "I find it interesting," Gray said. "I can't call it a setup. I don't know what it was. I find it amazing."

Gray said he was visited on Memorial Day by FBI agents who assured him he is not a target of an investigation. He was told, however, that federal officials were "looking into allegations involving an employee or employees" on his staff. Gray said he was not told who the employees under investigation were, nor the allegations against them, in spite of his request that they do so.

In a letter to Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, Gray called for an investigation by independent counsel into "illegal and unconscionable leaks" about a preliminary criminal

investigation into allegations that a non-working employee was carried on his congressional staff payroll. Gray also said, "The wrongdoing by officials in your own agency is far worse than anything these leakers have alleged to the press."

## **A**uthorization bill may force Kissinger from PFIAB

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has prepared the State Department authorization bill for fiscal year 1990, and has included a provision which could force Henry Kissinger to disclose his Kissinger Associates clients or to resign from the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

Introduced by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), the provision would require client disclosure by members of PFIAB who receive compensation from foreign governments or entities controlled by foreign governments. Helms originally proposed to ban anyone who receives such compensation, but that motion was defeated. The stipulation is aimed at PFIAB member Henry Kissinger, who has refused to disclose his clients.

## **G**regg faces more questions on Iran-Contra

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee intends to recall Donald P. Gregg, former national security adviser to Vice President George Bush and President Bush's nominee as ambassador to South Korea, for further questioning June 15 over his links with U.S.-backed Contra rebels in Nicaragua.

In testimony to the committee on May 12, Gregg claimed that he knew nothing of the secret supply of weapons to the Contras. Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) proposed that the committee schedule a vote on the Gregg nomination June 20 if enough information is received.

## **C**onservative Republicans irked at Bush inattention

Conservative Senate Republicans are threatening to hold up confirmation of sub-cabinet nominees and desert President Bush on key votes, saying that the administration is ignoring their candidates for government jobs and is moving too slowly in filling top positions.

"The process simply isn't working, and there are major frustrations for everybody," said Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.), chairman of the Republican Senate Steering Committee. Wallop is delaying the nomination of Peter F. Secchia as ambassador to Italy and suggested that he will hold up other nominees if conservatives continue to be ignored.

On Wednesday May 31, Vice President Dan Quayle lobbied Wallop to get him to stop stonewalling nominees, to no avail.

White House Personnel Director Chase Utermeyer said the President has chosen 226 candidates for the top 341 posts, with only 120, or 35%, of those requiring Senate confirmation.

Wallop also indicated that the administration's snub of the 23 conservatives on the Steering Committee could prevent President Bush from winning approval from conservatives for controversial legislation.