

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Drought relief bill passes by narrow margin

The Senate Agriculture Committee voted 10-9 along party lines on July 25 to approve a measure authorizing \$955 million to compensate farmers of more than 500 different crops for drought and other weather-related damage.

The Senate bill is similar to the House version, but offers an estimated \$300 million less in aid.

Committee chairman and sponsor of the bill, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), said the lower funding level was set to meet budget limitations imposed by President Bush, who earlier indicated that he would veto the more expensive House version. The Senate version of the bill reduces benefits and sets tougher eligibility standards.

House slashes SDI program

The House dealt a major blow to the already seriously underfunded Strategic Defense Initiative on July 25, slashing proposed spending by more than one-third in a 248-175 vote.

The proposed funding level would reduce the administration's \$4.9 billion request for SDI research to \$3.1 billion, which is \$700 million more than the \$1.1 billion cut recommended by the House Armed Services Committee. This is the largest proposed cut in percentage terms since President Reagan called for building the system in 1983.

An amendment sponsored by Rep. Ron Dellums (D-Calif.) which would have limited SDI funding to a mere \$1.3 billion, to be used only for basic research programs, gathered serious support. Dellums had bent over backwards to give support to Soviet Mar-

shal Sergei Akhromeyev's attacks on the U.S. missile defense system when Akhromeyev testified before the House Armed Services Committee a week earlier. Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colo.) said during the battle on the House floor that he had been told that Gorbachov, keenly interested in eliminating the SDI, had argued with President Reagan, "All we want is what your own Congress wants with SDI."

The House then appropriated \$150 million of the money cut from the SDI for more helicopters, artillery rockets, and Army ammunition, and \$300 million for cleanup of nuclear defense facilities.

The House also backed an effort led by House Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.) to slow the B-2 Stealth bomber program. Aspin, who had invited Akhromeyev before the committee, told the Pentagon to "prune it or park it." The House put three conditions on the Pentagon if it wishes to continue to buy the \$520 million aircraft: cheaper construction costs, certification that the radar-evading plane meets test goals, and demonstration of a "high probability" of penetrating the well-defended Soviet airspace. The House bill authorizes four new bombers in the next two years if the Pentagon meets these requirements.

On July 25, the Senate approved the administration's request for eight bombers in an overwhelming 98-1 vote, but also required that the plane first achieve test goals.

Newt Gingrich now the target of ethics probe

Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), who initiated the ethics probe which led to the downfall of House Speaker Jim Wright, is the target of a probe by the

House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct into year-end temporary salary boosts which he gave to members of his staff in 1988. The staffers had taken a month-long leave to work in his reelection campaign in Georgia.

The committee has also been asked to investigate an unusual limited partnership that Gingrich established to promote a book he wrote with his wife and a third person.

Gingrich said on July 25 that the year-end raises, most of which disappeared from staff paychecks in January or February, were merely an effort to reward a mostly young and low-paid staff with extra funds that would be lost by his office if he did not use them. "It's fairly common practice if you have more money at the end of the year," said Gingrich.

House rules, however, prohibit use of official funds for campaign work, although staffers are free to campaign in their spare time if they also put in a full week's work on congressional business. Rep. Bill Alexander (D-Ark.) said the problem was not with year-end bonuses as such, but in giving them to workers who had recently returned from a campaign.

Panel votes delay in closing military bases

The House Appropriations Committee bucked heavy pressure and voted on July 26 to delay closing 11 of the 86 military bases slated to be closed, pending study of the actual savings to be expected.

The amendment, part of an \$8.7 billion 1990 Military Construction Appropriations bill, is seen as an attempt by congressmen to slow the closing down of military bases in their home districts. The House had voted

overwhelmingly in April to close 86 bases and reorganize more than 50 others, but the expected budget savings were not to be found. Many congressmen are not opposed to closing bases, just those in their own districts.

The 11 bases under study include George, Mather, and Norton Air Force Bases in California, Hunter's Point Naval Station and the Presidio in California, Fort Sheridan and Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois, Jefferson Proving Ground in Indiana, Lexington Depot in Kentucky, Pease Air Force Base in New Hampshire, and Fort Dix in New Jersey. Four other bases, including Fort Meade and Fort Holabird in Maryland, are also included in the study and would be covered by the amendment.

Conferes wrangle over S&Ls package

Congressional conferees considering the savings and loan bailout package still face a major hurdle in deciding whether the cost of the bailout should be put on budget. They have, however, reached a consensus on a number of differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill.

On July 26, senators finally agreed to the House position of stopping thrifts from holding any high-yielding junk bonds, when the conferees voted to require S&Ls to sell their \$14 billion in high-yield junk bonds. Junk bond issuers had argued that the generous yields more than compensated for the risks, although it was obvious that the deregulation of the S&Ls forced them into similar high-risk real estate investments, which accelerated the collapse of the industry.

House members yielded to the Senate position on regulation of the S&Ls, agreeing that the state-char-

tered thrifts would be supervised by a new agency within the Treasury Department that would take over the functions of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board. The House had wanted responsibility for state thrifts transferred to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which insures deposits at commercial banks.

Conferees also agreed that FHLBB chairman M. Danny Wall should not be required to be renominated or reconfirmed to head the new agency.

Space Station Freedom protected in House vote

The House rejected on July 20 an amendment by Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) which would have effectively killed Space Station Freedom, one of the few NASA programs to receive adequate funding by the House.

Schumer proposed transferring \$714 million from the space station to medical care, pollution control and research, and a variety of other projects. The House voted 291-125 to kill the amendment.

Helms seeks to counter Soviet embassy espionage

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) has introduced an amendment which seeks to limit Soviet capabilities to bug a future U.S. embassy in Moscow, and would require countermeasures against Soviet espionage conducted out of their proposed new Mount Alto embassy in Washington, D.C.

The Mount Alto embassy, largely built, is located at one of the highest points in Washington and would give the Soviets excellent possibilities for using electronic surveillance against

almost any point in the city.

The amendment calls for the United States not to move into the heavily bugged Moscow embassy compound, and not to allow the Soviets the facilities granted them by the State Department on Mount Alto, until the United States has a new and secure facility to use in Moscow.

No more tax dollars for pornography

An amendment that would prevent the National Endowment for the Arts from using tax dollars to support pornography, introduced by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), was attached to the Appropriations bill which passed the Senate on July 27.

Helms offered his amendment following controversy over an NEA-funded exhibition which was to be held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art by two homosexual photographers, Robert Maplethorpe and Andres Serrano. The exhibit included a number of images depicting sado-masochist and homoerotic acts. A Serrano photograph of a crucifix submerged in a container of urine was included in a traveling exhibit organized by an NEA-funded group, which also gave Serrano a \$15,000 grant.

The amendment bars funds for "obscene or indecent materials, including, but not limited to depictions of sado-masochism, homo-eroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex; or material which denigrates the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion or non-religion; or material which denigrates, debases, or reviles a person, group, or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin."