

## **Congressional Closeup** by Kathleen Klenetsky

### **C**ongress beats drums on Social Security

When Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.) threw down the gauntlet to the Republicans with his proposal to reduce the Social Security tax and remove the Social Security surplus from the budget calculation, he started the ball rolling in what is likely to become a knock-down, drag-out, election year brawl on Capitol Hill.

Although the lipping senator from New York perhaps thought that the proposal would have some appeal in pointing out the hypocrisy of the Bush budget-balancing, the question has a great potential for backfiring on Moynihan and his Democratic colleagues. President Bush, in his Jan. 31 State of the Union message, was able to bring down some applause with his response to Moynihan: "Don't mess with Social Security." On Feb. 7, Congressional Republicans appeared on Capitol Hill with buttons saying "Save Social Security—Vote Republican," to the Democrats' chagrin.

Whether the Republicans will be able to so easily turn the tables on this traditionally Democratic issue, remains to be seen. The Moynihan proposal is also opposed by the Association of Retired Persons (AARPP), the largest senior citizens' group in the U.S. The AARPP believes the proposal could jeopardize \$55 billion or more in annual revenues which are part of the reserve to be used for paying future benefits.

There is no doubt about the weaknesses and failures of the Bush administration, especially in the area of economic policy. If the Democratic congressmen were to return to the outlook of the Kennedy presidency on this matter—instead of repeating hollow eulogies to that era as they are now—they would have a field day in this election year. But whether there is

enough of that kind of political acumen in the present generation of Democratic contenders remains a really open question.

### **E**agleburger grilled on toast to Beijing leaders

In hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Feb. 7, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger was lambasted for the kowtowing of the Bush administration to the bloody Chinese communist regime. Last July, Eagleburger and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, both former employees of Henry Kissinger, had gone on a secret rendezvous where they toasted the Chinese leaders, even while the Bush administration, catering to the mass outrage in the U.S. over the massacre, was officially condemning the Chinese regime.

Eagleburger was called before the Foreign Relations Committee to answer questions concerning the administration's current China policy. President Bush recently vetoed a bill which would have given Chinese students in the U.S. legal protection from having to return to China to face possible death at the hands of the regime.

Eagleburger claimed that there has been improvement in the attitude of the Chinese government after the trips of former President Nixon and Henry Kissinger last last year, and argued that it were better to maintain some footing with the regime in order to have the capability of influencing its policy.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) noted that even while "the last drops were still glistening in the empty glasses" of Scowcroft and Eagleburger, the Chinese Communist secret police were starting to persecute the Catholic Church, for fear that the Church

"might remind the Chinese people of human dignity and freedom." Helms condemned a policy of "holding hands with a regime that runs tanks over unarmed students."

Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) said that, had it not been for the weakness shown by the Bush administration, the revolution in China might have been as successful as that in East Germany. "You've done nothing but dampen and help crush the revolution in China," said Biden.

### **C**oncern over possible U.S. sellout of Afghanistan

Just prior to Secretary of State James Baker's leaving to meet in Moscow with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, 19 members of Congress signed a letter to President Bush expressing concern that Baker might agree to a defective political settlement on Afghanistan.

The letter says that there is concern that Baker will base his decisions on faulty information he received from the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department, and the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan. It charges that the information from these sources is as different as night and day from reports the congressmen have received from reliable sources fresh from the battlefield.

### **C**ongress hears about Panama regime drug links

In comments on the floor on Feb. 7, Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) warned of the connections of new Panamanian President Guillermo Endara and Vice President Guillermo Ford. Commenting on House Resolution 3952, which would provide token emergency eco-

conomic assistance to the new puppet government, Miller commented that he was "concerned that current leaders of the new government maintain their close ties to institutions that have been directly implicated in drug money laundering."

Referring to a front-page *New York Times* article on the subject, Miller noted that Endara had served as a director of a bank used heavily by the Medellín, Colombia drug cartel, and that Ford was part owner of the Dadeland Bank of Florida, which had been named two years ago as a central financial institution for Gonzalo Mora, one of the Medellín cartel's biggest money launderers.

Miller added, "We are providing aid to a struggling democracy. But we will not write a blank check to those without the commitment to rooting out drug trafficking and drug profiteers."

## **D**emocrats demand larger defense cuts

Interviewed on ABC's "Good Morning Show," Democratic Senator Al Gore (D-Tenn.) urged that the United States help the Soviet Union "and ourselves at the same time" by reducing troop commitments in the light of "dramatic changes in Eastern Europe" and "the changes in the Soviet Union's foreign policy. . . . We ought to really consider," said Gore, "whether or not now is the time to make some adjustments in our policy toward the Soviet Union, particularly as our own defense budget comes up for debate."

On Feb. 4, in an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press," Democratic Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell announced that his party would develop an alternative 1991 budget proposal to the one announced

by President Bush a week earlier. Mitchell said the Democrats were prepared to go further on troop reductions in Europe than the total 225,000 suggested by Bush in his State of the Union message. "I believe we can and should go further," said Mitchell. "I believe we should maintain a residual force."

## **A**dministration endorses Dole proposal on aid cuts

Secretary of State James Baker III told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Feb. 1 that current earmarking meant that the administration had to cut aid for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that were cooperating with Washington's fight against the drugs trade. He endorsed Republican Minority Leader Sen. Robert Dole's (R-Kan.) proposal to cut funds earmarked for other countries. Dole had proposed to cut foreign aid by 5% for certain countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, and Israel, with the rationale that the Cold War was over.

"We are not just constrained but prohibited when it comes to securing assistance," said Baker, "so we have no flexibility, even when it is important in terms of the changing priorities of our foreign policy."

## **J**udiciary Committee reduces RICO penalties

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted 11-2 on Feb. 1 to reduce penalties that could be imposed in civil suits brought under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) and Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Ut.), the proponents of the measure, said RICO was being misused to label many legitimate defendants as racketeers. Civil RICO has been used in

sexual harassment cases, landlord-tenant disputes, wrongful discharge cases, and against a union in a labor dispute—cases which, Hatch noted, have nothing to do with organized crime.

The original RICO legislation allows triple damages to be recovered by plaintiffs in civil RICO suits. The bill now approved by the Judiciary Committee and sent to the full Senate, would limit triple damages to cases brought by federal or state government prosecutors, but not by non-government plaintiffs. Attorneys' fees, legal costs, and actual damages could still be recovered.

## **F**ight is on to keep increased space budget

At a hearing on Feb. 6 before the full House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, committee chairman Robert Roe (D-N.J.) stressed that the \$15.1 billion which NASA requested for Fiscal Year 1991 would require a united fight in order to pass unscathed through Congress. Roe commented that "There is no question that we welcome this budget request. Yet it is also clear that there must be a consensus on these issues."

Roe decided to hold full committee hearings on the budget request, rather than the normal subcommittee hearing, since it "represents a major reordering of our nation's spending priorities."

For the first time since the Apollo program, the proposed NASA budget is 1% of the total federal budget. In the 1960s it was nearly 4%. In the hearings today, NASA administrator Richard Truly stressed that as regards Space Station Freedom, in the 1991 budget the program will make a transition from paper studies to fabrications hardware, and that therefore there is no place left to cut.