

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Conditions placed on MFN status for China

The House of Representatives passed on July 10 a resolution extending Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to China for one year, but conditions future renewal on changes in China's policies on human rights, weapons proliferation, and trade.

The House passed the resolution by a vote of 313-112 with broad bipartisan support, after first approving a resolution denying MFN by a vote of 223-204, short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a threatened presidential veto. President Bush wants the Congress to renew MFN for China without conditions.

To obtain future extension of MFN, the resolution requires that China free political prisoners, prevent proliferation of nuclear or missile technology, and prevent export of products made by prisoners in forced labor camps. It also requires that China provide assurances that it does not support coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization; that it "moderate opposition to Taiwan's formal entry into the international trade community"; and that it make "overall significant progress" in curbing human rights abuses.

In the Senate, two bills have been put forward. One would end China's MFN status outright. The other, similar to the House bill, is supported by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) and would attach human rights conditions to granting of MFN status. The Mitchell version is expected to pass and, together with the House bill, be sent to the White House, where it is expected to be vetoed. President Bush would then need 34 votes to sustain his veto.

Many Democrats in the Senate remain undecided, particularly those from farm states who will be directly

affected by the stoppage of wheat sales to China. The Senate is scheduled to take up the bill before the August recess.

'October Surprise' probe gains momentum

House Speaker Rep. Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) moved closer to calling for a formal congressional investigation into allegations that the Reagan-Bush campaign negotiated a deal with Iran to delay release of U.S. embassy hostages until after the 1980 elections. "More and more I think I am being persuaded that this matter needs to be put into some sort of conclusive and, I hope, final review, if that is possible," said Foley.

Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), a leading Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a television interview on July 7 that he would favor a bipartisan, low-key official congressional probe of the allegations.

The guilty plea of Alan D. Fiers, former chief of the CIA Central American task force, in the coverup of the Iran-Contra scandal has also led to the postponement of the Senate hearings on the nomination of National Security Council Deputy Director Robert Gates to head the CIA. The Fiers guilty plea revives interest in Gates's knowledge of the scandal, as Gates was Fiers's superior during the period in question.

Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) expressed skepticism that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence would be able to get to the Gates nomination until the committee had learned what Fiers, and his immediate superior, Clair George, actually knew. Fiers discovered that George

already had knowledge of the diversion of funds to the Contras when he attempted to inform George at the time he learned about the operation.

Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska), vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee, indicated on July 15 that the Gates hearing would not be scheduled before special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh has completed his investigation. Murkowski indicated that the committee must hear from Fiers and George "either directly or indirectly, through the special prosecutor" before voting on the nomination.

Senate panel backs full space station funding

The Senate Appropriations Committee voted up the recommendation of its subcommittee to grant the full administration request of \$2 billion for Space Station Freedom. The total NASA budget, however, at \$14.305 billion, is only \$437 million above this year's budget, and \$1.5 billion less than NASA requested.

The House appropriated the same amount for FY 92 as NASA has this year, which is almost a \$2 billion cut from the administration request. The Appropriations bill will go to the Senate floor before the August recess, but will not go to conference committee until after the summer recess.

On July 11, House Science, Space, and Technology Committee chairman George Brown (D-Calif.) brought a number of space policy experts and the full crew of the last Space Shuttle mission before the committee, to try to get help in the fight for funding for the Space Station. Gen. Tom Stafford, head of the Synthesis group which released a report on the Moon/Mars mission in June, stressed the im-

portance of Space Station Freedom for the Space Exploration Initiative.

The deep cuts in the overall NASA budget will cripple new starts and decrease funding for space science and other programs.

New population control initiative introduced

At a press conference on July 11, the so-called World Population Day, Reps. Peter Kostmayer (D-Penn.) and John Porter (R-Ill.) introduced a resolution expressing the will of the Congress that the United States pursue the goal of making birth control available to everyone on the planet by the year 2000. The resolution is being sponsored by the Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation, whose representatives participated in the press conference.

The resolution states that "in order to remedy the imbalance created by the world population crisis, it has become vitally important for the U.S. to advance worldwide voluntary family planning assistance. . . . Too many people consuming too many resources too rapidly is leading to the contamination and depletion of the planet's natural resources in nations both rich and poor. This cycle is exacerbating rampant poverty and slowing gains in the standard of living, particularly in the developing world, where the majority of population growth is taking place."

If passed, the U.S. would become the first of 79 nations which endorsed the "Amsterdam Declaration," the goal of which is to make birth control available to everyone on the planet by 2000, to commit itself to implementing the declaration.

The resolution would also, according to the Sierra Club, give unified policy guidance to the six major committees which must act to implement the recommendations. The declaration includes two key recommendations: giving access to contraception to all people, and identifying an annual funding target of \$9 billion to be devoted to the contraception program.

Aware that the bill could meet opposition in the U.S. from the Right-to-Life movement and others, Porter stressed that the bill was primarily intended for Third World countries, where the "population explosion" was the greatest, rather than for the U.S.

Maglev development bill introduced into House

On July 11, Rep. Leon Panetta (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Budget Committee, introduced the Magnetic Levitation Research, Development, and Construction Act of 1991.

The bill would allow the use of the Highway Trust Fund to provide \$750 million as the federal portion of funding over the next five years for research, development, and construction of a prototype magnetic levitation high-speed rail system which would subsequently be converted to commercial use. The bill provides a timetable to achieve a prototype system within the next six years. It also requires the awarding of a contract for building the prototype to the winner of a design competition within 18 months after enactment of the legislation, and requires a constructed prototype, ready for operational testing, within the following three years.

Federal funding under the bill would be matched up to 25% by eligi-

ble applicants which could include private businesses, and public and private education and research organizations. The same concept has already been endorsed by the Senate as part of the recently passed highway-transit reauthorization.

Panetta noted in comments on the floor that the maglev technology "has a unique potential to significantly reduce our dependence on the automobile. . . . An efficient, integrated transportation network is an essential element in assuring the economic progress of this country."

Durenberger attacks death penalty clauses

In a rare show of sanity, Sen. David Durenberger (R-Minn.) attacked the logic behind the "rush to kill" efforts in the Congress to expand the death penalty.

Noting that studies by both the *American Sociological Review* and the FBI have suggested that the death penalty does not deter violent crime, Durenberger said that he would vote against the present Violent Crime Control Act. "The vast majority of the free world has rejected the death penalty," he said, "while the United States is in the company of the more intolerant and backward regimes of the world in its use of capital punishment. The United States' standing as a proponent of human rights around the world is undermined because we continue to impose the death penalty."

The senator noted that the bills are not about deterrence of crime, but about vengeance, an appetite which, he said, was "unbecoming of a civilized nation and one which we will never be able to satisfy."