

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### House Republicans demand tougher crime bill

House Republicans are up in arms over the fate suffered by President Bush's much-touted crime bill, which has been partially "de-fanged" by the House Judiciary Committee.

The bill, as passed by the House, included major changes in judicial procedures, a significant reduction in the time allotted for *habeas corpus* procedures for persons on death row, and revisions to expand admission of evidence seized without a search warrant, as long as the evidence had been gathered in "good faith."

The committee succeeded in eliminating many of the more controversial elements of the bill in House-Senate conference. The expansion of the death penalty, a key element of the Bush anti-crime "offensive," was restricted by the committee, which mandated that certain court circuits, where a large percentage of blacks have been sentenced to death, would be limited in meting out the death penalty. Republicans have committed themselves to replacing the clauses, and to eliminate what they consider "racial quotas," when the bill comes to the floor.

### Serbian atrocities assailed by D'Amato

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) introduced a resolution on Oct. 2 which calls for a halt of all loans and credits and the imposition of a complete trade embargo against Serbia until Serbia has "ceased its armed conflict with the other ethnic peoples of Yugoslavia" and its "pattern of systematic violations of human rights within the borders of Yugoslavia."

The continuing bloodshed against Croatia and the failure of the Serbian

Army to adhere to any cease-fire have increased concern in Congress over the situation, and prompted the D'Amato resolution.

Other congressmen want to go further than an embargo, and some are calling for the recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia.

In floor comments on Oct. 9, Rep. John Kasich (R-Ohio) pointed to the responsibility of Secretary of State James Baker III in encouraging the Serbian hardliners in the belief that the United States would tolerate unlimited force against Croatia. Kasich said, "It is time the United States government faced reality and recognized the independence of Croatia and demand an end to Serbian violence against Croatia."

Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.) expressed similar wishes in comments on the Senate floor Oct. 4: "I think it is time," said Nickles, "that the United States considered recognizing the governments of Croatia and Slovenia." Other congressional offices have expressed interest in sponsoring a resolution calling on the Bush administration to recognize Croatia.

### MFN proposed for Hungary and Czechoslovakia

A resolution was introduced into the House on Oct. 8 which would extend Most Favored Nation status to Czechoslovakia and Hungary on an unconditional basis. Hungary has had MFN status since 1978, while Czechoslovakia first received it in 1990 following congressional approval of a bilateral trade agreement.

Currently, the MFN status of these countries must be reviewed each year to see if they are adhering to the Jackson-Vanik rules on emigration. The

resolution was introduced by Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.). Separate legislation is pending which would eliminate the Jackson-Vanik restrictions for the Baltic states.

### AIDS infects 4-5 million Americans, says Burton

Rep. Dan. Burton (R-Ind.) warned Oct. 2 about the need for national legislation to stem the spread of the deadly AIDS epidemic. Burton disputed claims by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia that there were only 1.5 million people infected with the virus, stating his belief that there were more like 4-5 million Americans infected.

"We had 1 to 1.5 million five years ago," said Burton, "and it was doubling then every year to 18 months. It is inconceivable to me that we would still have only 1.5 million people infected, especially in view of the fact that we are going to have 250,000 people dead or dying by the end of this year alone."

Burton noted that the disease is now spreading rapidly into "the young heterosexual community. . . . It is going to spread like wildfire unless we do something about it." Said Burton, "For each person who gets AIDS, it costs this country and the health community \$100,000 to \$150,000 from the time they get the disease until they die. If you put a pencil to that, it means that if we get 4 million or 5 million people dead or dying of the AIDS virus, which is likely, we are going to destroy the health-care system in this country or else we are going to give much less care to those who are infected with this virus."

Burton called for a comprehensive program to meet the crisis, which

would include requiring a national program to test every adult in the country annually; increased research to find a way to cure or to stop the spread of the disease; a program of education to encourage monogamous relationships; and penalties for those who knowingly spread the disease.

"The longer we ignore this, the longer we keep our head in the sack hoping this will go away, doing very little or nothing," Burton warned, "the more people we are condemning to die and the bigger the drain on the future of the United States of America, both as far as human beings are concerned and as far as our economy is concerned."

Legislation, introduced by Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.), is now pending in the House which would require health-care workers infected with the HIV virus to inform their patients prior to treating them.

## **Gonzalez to Bush: 'It's a depression!'**

House Banking Committee chairman Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) attacked efforts by the Bush administration to "pass the buck" for the economic depression, in floor statements on Oct. 11.

Gonzalez called the plans by the administration to loosen regulation of the nation's 12,200 commercial banks "a step so reminiscent of the 1980s when so-called forbearance, and that is a fancy word in banking jargon that means you hold up enforcing such things as adequate capital standards and the like. That was the order of the day in the early 1980s."

Such a policy, Gonzalez warned, would "create a brand-new crunch, a bone-crunching of taxpayers who will

pay a heavy price for a new round of regulatory laxness."

Gonzalez asserted that the country was in the midst of a depression. "The economists, all of the big-shot economists, used to define a depression if it was a recession that lasted more than a year. Well this is what we have had, and nobody wants to call it that because everybody seems to be scared to confront the reality of what our country is facing. We have an unacceptably high rate of unemployment. We have an unacceptable debt structure on every level of our society, governmental, private, you and I, and corporate, the greatest debt structure in the total history of mankind." Gonzalez pointed to the fact that the U.S. has ceased to be a manufacturing nation as the root cause of the present crisis.

## **Texan points to rule of 'higher law'**

Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) decried the "erosion" of the "old moorings to which we are tied, institutions, moral standards," and warned that the United States will face the repercussions of its failure to recognize a law higher than man-made law.

Referring to the attempts to pay debt which have led into the wars of the 20th century, Gonzalez said that "mankind just cannot have the kind of bloodletting that these wars in the 20th century have recorded."

"And even the Persian Gulf," he said, "in which we actually eliminated even civilians, but even excluding civilians in the Persian Gulf, we had over 100,000 Iraqi Muslims killed by us. You cannot have that without having some repercussion somewhere down the line. There is a higher law than our

man-made laws that govern, a sort of a law of compensation that seems to be operative in human destiny . . . in which even today we must debate fundamentally whether we are going to adhere to it, as we have already gone a long way in abandoning it."

## **House highway bill bumps budget agreement**

The House Public Works and Transportation Committee voted 52-3 on Oct. 15 to approve a \$151 billion highway transport authorization bill for highways, bridges, mass transit, and transportation safety. The House proposal is \$28 billion more than the Senate version, which was kept within the limits imposed by last year's budget agreement by axing a number of programs contained in the House bill.

The House bill would finance programs in part by extending for four years half of last year's 5¢ gasoline tax increase. The administration, which has been opposed to any bill which would go over the limits of the budget agreement or would require new taxes, opposes the legislation.

Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner called the bill a budget-buster and said that he would recommend that the President veto it.

## **No unemployment benefits as Senate override fails**

The Senate failed to override President Bush's veto of the extension of unemployment benefits on Oct. 16. The Democratic leadership failed to garner the 67 votes necessary to override. The Senate vote was 65-35, with many Republicans voting to override. The Senate has yet to override a Bush veto.