

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Floor fight expected on Space Station funding

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing, and Independent Agencies narrowly approved funding for Space Station Freedom in a 6-5 vote on June 25. The subcommittee agreed to provide \$1.7 billion for the space station in fiscal year 1993, a reduction from the \$2 billion appropriated this year.

Subcommittee Chairman Bob Traxler (D-Mich.), an opponent of the space station, thought that the floor vote would be a close one. "The station represents a major science program that in our present economic situation we can't afford." Last year, Traxler's subcommittee voted 6-3 to kill the space station, but funding was restored by the full House and Senate.

The House leadership, however, is fighting for funding. "It is very expensive; that is true," said House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.). But he noted that NASA is concentrating "on a much leaner and more cost-effective program. . . . I think we have a lot of strong support in the right quarters."

Russian aid package passes Senate

The Senate approved on July 2 a wide-ranging package of economic aid to Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union. The bill, the Freedom Support Act, which included a \$12.3 billion increase in the U.S. contribution to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was passed in an overwhelming 76-20 vote.

The bill was formulated in such a way as to imbed the controversial IMF quota increase in a package of "aid"

measures which were already in the pipeline in other pieces of legislation. This was designed to force a recalcitrant Congress, which has often balked at giving the IMF more funds, to approve the quota increase. Similarly, amendments on numerous local projects were included in the bill in an attempt to make the aid package palatable to voters back home.

The Senate defeated a number of so-called "killer" amendments which had been offered in the course of the debate.

A vote on the Russian aid package was also delayed because Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) insisted that the Senate vote on a balanced budget amendment. A similar measure had been defeated in the House recently, although by only nine votes. An amendment to the Constitution has to be passed by three-fourths of both houses. Faced with opposition from both the Senate Democratic leadership and the White House, Gramm withdrew his amendment when it became clear that he didn't have enough votes to even bring the amendment to the floor.

Two appointees blocked over Contra aid ties

The possible involvement of Joseph G. Sullivan and Michael G. Kozak, two senior State Department officials for Latin America, in the secret aid program to Nicaraguan Contra rebels, has blocked Senate confirmation of their appointments as ambassadors to Nicaragua and El Salvador, respectively.

Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) and Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) are demanding to know what the nominees knew and did about the covert pro-

gram, which was administered by the CIA. The program which is at the center of the controversy, the Nicaraguan Exile Relocation Program (NERP), funneled about \$600,000 during 1989 and early 1990 to Nicaraguan Contra leaders and their supporters who had been in exile in Miami and other locations during the Sandinista regime.

Dodd and Helms feel that NERP violated a March 1989 bipartisan agreement to end the U.S. funding to the Contra rebellion against the leftist Sandinistas. Until they get some clarification, the senators are sitting on the nominations.

A State Department review of NERP concluded that there was "no evidence of any intent" on the part of the State Department or of Kozak and Sullivan, to violate any relevant law or restriction. The review seems to have satisfied no one. As a result of the standoff, there has been no U.S. ambassador in Managua for four months and none in San Salvador for six months.

Congress forces rail workers back to work

Congress approved legislation on June 26 to force an immediate end to the two-day labor dispute that shut down railroad freight service nationwide, and to block a threatened passenger rail strike against Amtrak. The House approved the legislation in a 248-140 vote and sent it to the Senate, which passed it by a vote of 87-6.

The legislation ordered the nation's major freight railroads to immediately resume operations and to submit their contract dispute with the International Association of Machinists to binding arbitration.

The action is a major blow to labor's right to strike. Rep. Pat Williams (D-Mont.), chairman of the House subcommittee on labor management relations, called the legislation "a fundamental mistake." The passage of this legislation, he said, "means an end to the right of railroad workers to withhold their labor."

Rep. Paul Kanjorski (D-Pa.) said that "the right to strike . . . is the only tool our workers have to express their collective desires upon corporate management" and that "the collective bargaining process must be allowed to run its course, and, at the moment, Congress should stay out of this dispute."

The Bush administration is now preparing to move for more changes in the law which would further restrict rail workers' right to strike.

Democratic senators propose 'growth' package

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) was joined by a dozen of his colleagues, including Al Gore (D-Tenn.), Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), John Kerry (D-Mass.), Charles Robb (D-Va.), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Harris Wofford (D-Penn.), Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Bob Graham (D-Fla.), and Donald Riegle (D-Mich.), in a Capitol Hill press conference on July 1 to present the "U.S. Economic Leadership Strategy," the legislative package which is meant to be the congressional correlative of the economic program of Gov. Bill Clinton (D-Ark.).

The "strategy" consists of 30 or more legislative proposals presented during the course of last year, ostensibly aimed at "reinvigorating U.S. in-

dustrial production." The proposals are a hodge-podge, combining tougher trade restrictions, measures for "opening closed markets," government support for "high-tech" industries, tax credits for manufacturing, increased funding for R&D, measures to create a highly skilled work force, and a new "alliance" of government and industry.

Profiling themselves as the party of "industrial revival," the Democrats hope to use the legislative package to gather support for the Clinton presidential campaign as well as to ensure that Democratic majorities are elected to the Senate and the House.

The "economic strategy" contains numerous contradictions, however, as was indicated by the response to questions raised by an *EIR* correspondent. Mitchell was asked if this so-called "growth package" didn't contradict the Democratic support for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which would export U.S. jobs to Mexico, and the various environmental proposals, like the Clean Air Act sponsored predominantly by Senator Gore, which are placing a severe handicap on reviving many U.S. industries.

Mitchell nervously punted on NAFTA, claiming that the vote taken last year by the Congress was simply approval of the process by which NAFTA would be negotiated (the fast-track proposal), not support for the treaty itself, which has not yet been negotiated. "No one can say how people will vote," said Mitchell, "since there is as yet no agreement."

On the environmental issue, Mitchell claimed that there was no contradiction, since "environmental technologies" are an important new market, which the Japanese and the Germans were now getting into.

Gore felt compelled to answer, since he felt the question "besmirched" his honor, that the new environmental restrictions were a boon to industry rather than an impediment. "Mexico City is eager to buy," he said, "but not laser-guided missile technology, but rather goods for long-term industrial production, goods which will not pollute their already-polluted environment. This represents a great potential for our industries," he claimed. "Some businessmen have misunderstood the nature of this legislation, seeing it wrongly as a threat, rather than as an opportunity," Gore lamented.

India and Indonesia targeted for aid cutoff

Two amendments attached to this year's foreign aid bill target India and Indonesia for cutoffs of U.S. aid.

One amendment to the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill proposed by Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) and passed 219-200 on June 25, penalizes India for alleged human rights abuses in Punjab and Kashmir. The amendment would cut off \$24 million in developmental assistance this year until India repeals certain laws dealing with detainment without formal charge or trial, and searches and arrests without warrants. The amendment is one of the more blatant intrusions into the internal affairs of a sovereign nation.

Similar legislation sponsored by Rep. Tony Hall (D-Ohio) and Rep. Ronald Machtley (R-R.I.) in the House, would halt all military assistance funds now going to Indonesia under the category of "International Military Education and Training," because of alleged human rights violations against insurgents in East Timor.