

## **Congressional Closeup** by William Jones

### **Roybal asks GAO to examine pension funds**

Rep. Edward R. Roybal (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Select Committee on Aging, announced on Sept. 21 that he was requesting the General Accounting Office to examine the status of public pension plans, including funding and contribution levels. Roybal said that he would be holding more hearings to investigate the health of the funds.

Roybal's committee hearings last year revealed that a number of state and local governments were engaging in a variety of methods to divert public pension funds, including delaying or reducing contributions to the funds, changing the actuarial assumptions that determine contribution levels, taking loans, or even withdrawing money from the funds, to alleviate their own budget crises.

Roybal said that the committee would be hearing from the GAO as well as from public employees, public pension fund trustees, and "others with expertise in this area. I remain concerned by the impact of this continued trend on the financial retirement security of public workers and retirees, as well as the impact on all taxpayers, who may have to eventually make up any shortfalls in the funding of public pension funds through additional taxes."

### **Hastings wins House primary in Florida**

Former federal Judge Alcee Hastings, whose impeachment was reversed in September, won the Democratic nomination to Congress in the 23rd C.D. of Florida over state Rep. Lois Frankel with 58% of the vote on Oct. 1. The district, which is centered around Fort Lauderdale, is heavily Democratic, and Hastings is pegged to easily

beat his Republican opponent in November.

Hastings was the first black federal judge to be appointed in the state of Florida. Accused of bribery and corruption, Hastings was acquitted in a 1983 criminal trial. The U.S. Senate, however, convicted him anyway. The impeachment and conviction were then overturned on Sept. 17 by federal Judge Stanley Sporkin, who ruled that the full Senate, not just a panel of 12 senators, should have tried him.

### **Simon attacks Germany over 'anti-Semitism'**

Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), the darling of the Anti-Defamation League, attacked the German government for permitting what he called "anti-Semitism without Jewish people," referring to neo-Nazi attacks on foreigners in Germany, and for doing "little to soothe the tensions."

Simon criticized the German government for not doing enough to stop the activities of the neo-Nazis in Germany. Simon also criticized Chancellor Helmut Kohl's attempts to reform the German immigration law, one of the most liberal in all of Europe, in order to stem some of the violent outbreaks.

### **Senate approves START treaty**

The Senate approved the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) on Oct. 2 by a vote of 93-6. Despite the lopsided vote, the debate was intense, as conservative Republicans tried to scuttle the treaty. Opponents warned that the treaty would allow Russia to modernize and maintain unlimited amounts of non-deployed weapons.

Objections were also raised against the "permissiveness" of the treaty in allowing the Russians to retain their nuclear warheads (START is focused on the destruction of launchers, rather than warheads), the shoddy record of the Soviets in keeping arms control agreements, and the extreme difficulties in monitoring the treaty (on-site inspections would be limited to assembly facilities and not production facilities).

Several "killer amendments" offered by Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) were easily defeated. Some senators expressed concern about the speed with which the United States, for economic more than military reasons, was dismantling its military facilities, far beyond the level required by the START treaty.

### **IMF quota increase passed by House**

The House passed the Freedom Support Act, which contained a \$12 billion quota increase for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), by a vote of 232-164 on Oct. 3. Although only a part of the \$12 billion will be going to countries of the former Soviet Union, the controversial measure was squeezed onto the bill authorizing U.S. aid and given the misleading name in order to make it more palatable to legislators.

An alliance of liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans opposed the bill. Liberals, like Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), opposed it as a drain from "limited resources" which they believe should be applied to domestic needs.

Conservatives objected to anything being given to the former Soviet republics, given the tenuous nature of the political situation there, and because of recent sales of diesel subma-

rines to Iran by Russia. "I think we ought to put this bill on hold," said Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), during the debate on Oct. 3, "until our State Department or the National Security Council clarifies the issue as to whether this sale is part of a pattern of the transference of weapons of war to the most irresponsible countries in the world."

Rep. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) said that this was not a "support act" for Russia at all, but rather an IMF quota increase bill. "Part of the problem here," said Kyl, "is that this IMF quota business is really for the purpose of raising the U.S. share of money to the IMF. It is not to help Russia." Kyl noted that only half of the sum was to be spent in "assistance" to the former Soviet republics.

## **Abortion veto stands, but cable veto nixed**

The House failed on Oct. 2 to override President Bush's veto of a bill to eliminate the "gag rule" at federally funded family planning clinics. The House vote of 266-148 was 10 votes short of the two-thirds needed to override. It is the second time that the Congress has failed to override the President's veto of this particular legislation, and it was Bush's 35th straight veto to be upheld by Congress.

The "gag rule" prevents abortion counseling at federally funded family planning clinics except by physicians. The Senate had succeeded in overriding the veto in a vote of 73-26 on Oct. 1.

On Oct. 5, Congress did override the President's rejection of the cable regulation bill. The vote was 74-25 in the Senate and 308-114 in the House. The margin in the House was bigger than that by which the House passed the bill in September, as Democrats made a major effort to create the impression that President Bush is a lame duck.

## **Supreme Court okays retrial for Rep. Ford**

The U.S. Supreme Court on Oct. 5 upheld without comment the ruling of a federal judge that another trial on conspiracy, mail fraud, and bank fraud charges against Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.) should be held in Memphis, Tennessee, but that jurors would be selected from Jackson, Tennessee. The ruling was a setback for the Ford defense.

Ford had been tried in Memphis, but the trial was declared a mistrial when the predominantly black jury found it impossible to reach a verdict. Because many observers saw the charges as stemming from a government vendetta against Ford, the judge ruled that the retrial jury would be selected from the Jackson area. After a U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the ruling in March, Ford appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that the judge was wrong in arguing that black residents of Memphis could not serve as fair and impartial jurors.

## **Sudan targeted for 'international monitoring'**

A Senate Concurrent Resolution introduced by Paul Simon (D-Ill.) and Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) would effectively place Sudan under the same type of U.N. "receivership" as that suffered by Iraq. The crime of Sudan: refusing to cave in to the "new world order" of President Bush.

During the Persian Gulf war, Sudan sided with Iraq. On Oct. 5, Sudan came under attack when it proposed to export 20,000 tons of frozen beef to Iraq—shipments which are allowed under the U.N. sanctions.

The U.S. press has been full of stories about the killing of a U.S. AID worker—allegedly for treason—in

the city of Juba in the south of Sudan, which is besieged by rebels. Although the details are still unclear, it is alleged that the killing was carried out by the Sudanese Army. The government of Sudan has been engaged in a civil war in the south, in which foreign non-governmental organizations have been helping rebel groups under John Garang. Garang receives much of his financial and political support from the United States.

The legislation would allow the "Red Cross, U.S. officials, and other relief organizations" to have "unrestricted and unconditional access to all parts of the country." The resolution calls upon President Bush to work toward the convening of the U.N. Security Council to "consider further means" to deal with the situation in Sudan.

## **October Surprise probe gets funds, GOPers' goat**

Over Republican protests, the House voted on 221-181 Oct. 2 to provide approximately \$1.3 million to fund the investigation of the "October Surprise," in which the Reagan-Bush campaign is said to have delayed the release of hostages held by Iranian fundamentalists until after the 1980 election.

Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the bipartisan committee responsible for the probe, has said that it will still take weeks, possibly until next January, before the investigation will be completed. It began in February 1992.

House Minority Leader Bob Michel (R-Ill.) opposed the probe, calling the charges "libelous and unfounded." Michel also said that the audacity of the Congress to ask the taxpayers "to fund an investigation into these fantasies was beyond the pale."