

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### House votes to maintain HIV immigration ban

The House voted 356-58 on March 11 to support a Republican-sponsored amendment to maintain an immigration ban on persons who are infected with the HIV virus. The Senate had voted to maintain the ban in a similarly overwhelming 76-23 vote. Both votes came on legislation authorizing \$6.6 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The House action instructs its representatives to accept the Senate amendment in the House-Senate conference on NIH funding. The Senate amendment, sponsored by Don Nickles (R-Okla.), prohibits persons infected with the human immunodeficiency syndrome from being admitted as permanent immigrants. People who test positive for the HIV virus, which causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome, could enter the country for up to 30 days to receive medical care, attend conferences, conduct business, visit family, or vacation.

Rep. Thomas Bliley (R-Va.), who sponsored the House motion, commented, "We have never before permitted immigration of those who were infected in the middle of an epidemic. We should not start now."

### Committee okays Clinton budget, but fight looms

The Senate Budget Committee voted out President Clinton's economic package on March 11 after the Democratic majority cut a further \$96 billion over and above what Clinton had wanted. The resolution was adopted on a 12-9 committee vote along strict party lines.

The resolution still calls for large tax increases and a token "stimulus" for the five-year plan, although this could be whittled down even further. "Investment" spending would be in-

creased by \$124 billion, while taxes would be increased by a net \$295 billion. Spending in other areas would be cut by \$332 billion. Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) gloated that "we are witnessing the unraveling of the Clinton tax package tonight."

Many Democrats, distressed by the deep cuts in spending in the committee plan, are demanding that the White House and the House Democratic leadership back a \$16.2 billion short-term stimulus package as the price for their support. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus warned that they would not vote for the budget package unless they receive assurances that the stimulus will be adopted intact. The caucus also plans to offer an alternative budget resolution that would cut more deeply into defense spending.

Many representatives from farm states expressed dissatisfaction with the package. Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), usually a strong proponent of "deficit reduction," warned that the budget plan "would cripple the economy of the American West."

The additional cuts were defended on the basis of the need to keep the budget beneath the spending caps imposed by the 1990 budget agreement between President Bush and the Congress. The Senate resolution would achieve the \$62 billion in additional cuts by raising an additional \$22 billion in tax revenue and reducing or postponing spending of \$41 billion. The House version eliminates the \$62 billion through increased discretionary and mandatory spending, and avoids any new taxes.

The "austerity Democrats," not satisfied with that which they helped craft, turned around and threatened a fight when the measure comes to the floor. Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.), a leader of the "austerity Dems," is drafting an amendment that would force Congress and the administration either to shelve about \$10 bil-

lion of the total spending still in the package or offset it by reducing spending in other areas.

### Senate confirms Reno as attorney general nominee

The Senate approved on March 12 in a 98-0 vote President Clinton's third nominee for attorney general, Janet Reno. The Senate Judiciary Committee had approved the nomination the day before.

Reno said that one of her first tasks would be to rule on the future of FBI Director William Sessions. The fate of Sessions, who had come under fire from Reno's predecessor, Bush-appointed William Barr, will be determined by the President. Clinton has said, however, that the matter of the FBI chief would be reviewed by his new attorney general. Sessions has five years left to serve in a 10-year term as FBI director.

Reno's confirmation was marred by rumors, apparently circulated by National Rifle Association lobbyist David Gibbons, that she had once been arrested for drunk driving but had received lenient treatment by local police. The rumors proved to be unfounded and the NRA was forced to apologize to Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and the lobbyist forced to resign. Reno has been state attorney in Dade County, Florida for the past 15 years. She was the last Clinton cabinet member to be confirmed.

### NAFTA could be seriously in peril

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) could be in serious trouble in both houses of Congress. This was the message delivered to Trade Representative Mickey Kan-

tor, who testified before the House Ways and Means Committee on March 11.

"It's a treaty that's in trouble," said Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio), who has been critical of the treaty. Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.) indicated that it was a real question "whether or not we will have the ability to pass NAFTA at any time in the future unless there is a greater grassroots interest."

House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), feeling the heat from his labor constituents, said that he supports Mexico's efforts to improve work-place and environmental conditions, but that he would insist on strong supplemental agreements with Mexico. "I will not support NAFTA on a leap of faith," he said.

Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), chairman of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Trade and one of the early supporters of the treaty, doubted whether "anyone yet knows where the votes are" in the Senate. President Clinton has indicated that he will not send the treaty to Congress until he has worked out additional agreements which address the objections of the labor unions and the environmentalist groups.

## **Aspin calls for major base cuts**

Defense Secretary Les Aspin presented his plan for base closings on March 12, which would eliminate 31 bases and significantly reduce 134 more. Among the installations eliminated in the proposal are Homestead Air Force Base in Florida, the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, and McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. The closings would eliminate 24,000 military and 57,000 civilian jobs.

The proposal will now be presented to an eight-member bipartisan

presidential commission headed by former Rep. James Courter (R-N.J.), which will determine the final plan. It will then be presented to the House, the Senate, and the President, who must either accept or reject the plan *in toto*.

Aspin admits that the reductions will depend on developments in Russia. Interviewed on the NBC News program "Meet the Press" on March 14, Aspin said that there was "no question" that the cuts would be eliminated or slowed if there was a political shift in Russia.

## **Resolution seeks German role in peacekeeping**

A Senate resolution introduced on March 10 by Sen. William Cohen (R-Me.) calls for the "full and active participation" by Germany in international peacekeeping operations. The resolution is meant to second U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who has called for the "full participation" of Germany "in peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace-enforcing measures."

Germany is barred by its constitution from participating in military operations outside its borders. Bonn has introduced a constitutional amendment which would require simple majority approval by the Bundestag (parliament) to participate in "peacekeeping" and "peacemaking" activities, and two-thirds approval by the Bundestag in order to participate in collective self-defense outside NATO.

Cohen emphasized that "Germany is being encouraged to participate in the full spectrum of international military operations, from blue-helmet missions to future Desert Storms."

## **Gonzalez wants War Powers invoked in Somalia**

House Banking Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) called on President Clinton to invoke the War Powers Act or to pull U.S. troops out of Somalia.

The War Powers Act is a post-Vietnam War measure designed to ensure congressional approval before U.S. troops are sent into hostilities. It was enacted in 1973 after Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon deployed American troops without explicit congressional approval or an official declaration of war. Section 3 of the resolution orders the President "in every possible instance" to consult Congress before sending armed forces "into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances." The President is required to notify Congress in writing within 48 hours of deploying troops. Troops can then remain deployed for 60 days, after which time Congress must reauthorize the deployment.

President Bush notified Congress before the Somalia action, and the Senate passed a joint resolution authorizing it last December. Gonzalez argues that the 60-day period ended Feb. 8.

Other legislators object because Somalia has not been defined as a "hostile" situation. Rep. Vic Fazio (D-Calif.) has collected signatures on a letter to Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), appealing to him to support the action in order to "reverse the erosion" of congressional war powers.

In 1990, Democratic House members filed a lawsuit seeking to force President Bush to withhold military action against Iraq in the Persian Gulf war. Although a judge declined to stop deployment, Bush decided to secure Hill approval, which he got on a narrow vote.