

## **Congressional Closeup** by William Jones

### **H**ouse maintains ban on abortion funding

The House on June 30 upheld a 16-year-old ban on Medicaid-funded abortions by a vote of 255-178, except in cases where the life of the mother is in danger or in cases of rape or incest. The measure was passed as part of the appropriations bill for the Labor and the Health and Human Services departments.

The amendment, sponsored by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), was passed despite administration support for removing the ban. It is unlikely, however, that President Clinton will veto the bill even if the provision is passed by the Senate. Administration officials have indicated that federally funded abortions would be a part of their health care reform package.

During the debate, Hyde charged that some of the impetus for the abortion liberalization comes from political and social groups which are promoting liberal abortion laws as a subtle form of genocide against the poor and racial minorities.

### **G**onzalez calls for an end to the death penalty

Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) introduced a resolution in the House on July 1 which calls for a constitutional amendment to prohibit capital punishment within the United States. Calling the death penalty "an act of vengeance veiled as an instrument of justice," Gonzalez said that the death penalty "is meted out to the poor, to a disproportionate number of minorities, and does not either deter crime or advance justice."

Countering death penalty proponents who argue that it "fulfills some social need," Gonzalez said that such claims were "simply not true. . . . Studies fail to establish that the death

penalty either has a unique value as a deterrent or is a more effective deterrent than life imprisonment. . . . Rather than act as a deterrent, some studies suggest that the death penalty may even have a brutalizing effect on society."

Gonzalez cited Florida and Georgia, two states with the most executions since 1979, both of which experienced an increase in homicides following the resumption of capital punishment.

"Capital punishment has become a kind of grotesque lottery," Gonzalez said. "Nearly all other western democracies have abolished the death penalty without any ill effects. Let us not be left behind. Let us release ourselves from the limitations of a barbaric tradition that serves only to undermine the very human rights which we seek to uphold."

The resolution is being introduced as efforts are under way in Congress to speed up executions by limiting and streamlining the appeals process.

### **N**ational Endowment for Democracy funding cut

The House on June 22 cut all funding for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an organization which has come under attack for unlawful interference in the internal affairs of countries the world over. Its activities go by the name of Project Democracy.

Although the NED portrays itself as supporting "democratization," its support has always been channeled to groups and organizations effectively serving as agents of influence for those providing the funding—often in crass disregard for national sovereignty. As Rep. Tim Penny (D-Minn.) pointed out in the floor debate on June 22, the NED has heavily fund-

ed projects in Britain, France, and New Zealand, countries for which the "promotion" of democracy hardly seems appropriate. The NED has been active in eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Ibero-America, and Asia, where it finances candidates felt to be operating in line with U.S. foreign policy goals.

Although the NED was set up during the Reagan administration, Republicans voted 112-62 to cut its funding. The main sponsor of the amendment, Rep. Paul Kanjorski (D-Pa.), called it "an insult to the Constitution" to "give taxpayers' money to a private organization to carry on the foreign affairs of the United States."

### **S**pace Station Freedom survives House vote

In a vote of 196-220 on July 28, the House defeated an amendment by Rep. Tim Roemer (D-Ind.) which would have taken the \$2.1 billion for Space Station Freedom out of the NASA FY 94 budget. An identical provision offered to the NASA authorization bill the week before, was defeated by only a one-vote margin.

The arguments against building the Space Station rested almost entirely on claims that this money could go to reduce the deficit, even though the program would provide a major payoff to the U.S. economy in the form of spinoff technologies.

Rep. George Brown (D-Calif.), chairman of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee, stated that the opposition is "totally misguided and their arguments are wrong." He demonstrated with charts and numbers that the money that has been cut out of the NASA budget each of the past four years by the Appropriations Committee has never gone to reduce the deficit, but rather is "recycled" to other programs, such as the National

Science Foundation, veterans benefits, and programs under the Department of Housing and Urban Development. If the committee didn't have NASA, Brown said, "they'd have to invent it," because they would have no place from which to get more money for the other programs. Brown charged that the Appropriations Committee for the "past five years in a row, has redesigned the Space Station to take these cuts out of NASA."

Brown said that eliminating the Space Station would mean breaking international agreements with the U.S. allies participating in the program. He pointed out that cutting funding would put the United States far behind other advanced countries such as Germany and Japan, and even behind Taiwan and South Korea, in terms of research and development outlays as a percentage of GNP.

## **D**emocrats rally behind Clinton's energy tax

After meetings at the White House on July 1, Senate and House Democratic leaders indicated that they would fight to maintain some form of energy tax in the final budget legislation, giving a warning to those Democratic legislators who might want to eliminate it.

The original proposal for a broad-based BTU tax on all forms of energy consumption, which was to raise \$72 billion in revenue over five years, was maintained in the House version of the package, which passed by a small margin, but was replaced in the Senate version by a smaller tax on gasoline and transportation fuels which would raise \$23 billion during that same period. The Senate measure passed with Vice President Al Gore casting the tie-breaking vote.

Many Democrats, however, are hoping that they can replace these taxes with higher tax rates on corporations and wealthy Americans, which would not hurt them so much in the elections. Twenty-five moderate and conservative Democrats who skeptically supported the BTU tax, have signed a letter indicating their opposition to an energy tax and calling for increased corporate and individual marginal tax rates and more spending cuts.

Under pressure from the austerity Democrats and the Republicans, the House has already cut in half the spending increases sought by the administration. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.) has indicated that he will resist higher corporate tax rates, because he believes that higher rates would have devastating effects on the economy.

## **B**lack elected officials targeted by court ruling

The first black officials elected to Congress in North Carolina during this century now find their seats in doubt after a U.S. Supreme Court decision on June 28 which called into question the redistricting that helped these officials get elected. The ruling may affect much of the redistricting that had occurred in many states just prior to the 1992 elections.

North Carolina was forced to redraw its congressional districts after the Justice Department had determined that voting rights of blacks were being abridged. North Carolina's population is 22% black, and yet 1992 was the first year that a black congressman was elected in North Carolina since Reconstruction.

In a 5-4 decision, the court ruled that the North Carolina redistricting

"can be understood only as an effort to segregate voters." The ruling came as the result of a lawsuit raised by white voters who claimed that the redrawn district separated voters by race and thus violated their constitutional right to color-blind elections.

Many see the ruling as an attempt to eliminate the gains made by the black community in the redistricting. More lawsuits are expected. The Congressional Black Caucus issued a statement subsequent to the ruling warning that it "further encourages the pursuit of litigation across the nation . . . where African-Americans and Hispanics have been excluded from electoral participation by virtue of their minority status in the population."

## **F**unding for drug programs cut by House

The House slashed the funding for drug treatment and education programs by \$231 million in a measure contained in an appropriations bill passed on June 30.

Under pressure to cut spending further, officials from the Office of Management and Budget had reportedly proposed the funding cuts to the subcommittee responsible for the anti-drug funding. About \$131 million was cut from a Department of Education "drug free" schools program, \$33 million from the President's request for a "block grant" program to the states for alcohol and drug treatment, and \$66.8 million from a "capacity expansion" program aimed at directing treatment funds to inner-city areas.

Herb Kleber, executive vice president for the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, says that the House cuts would deprive about 45,000 addicts of treatment services. The cuts could be restored by the Senate.