

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

### Biological survey threatens economy

The House voted 255-165 on Oct. 26 to create a new agency within the Interior Department that will study, monitor, and catalogue the nation's plant and animal life. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, a darling of the environmentalist lobby, proposed the creation of the National Biological Survey (NBS) as a way to consolidate the biological research efforts of eight separate bureaus within his department, and to give the federal government a more reliable database of America's biological resources.

The intent of the NBS is to identify allegedly "endangered" species and sub-species. Babbitt claims the survey would provide an "early warning" of chronic declines in plant and animal species, allowing the federal government to intervene at an early stage to stop industrial development in areas where such "threatened" species are said to inhabit. An example of this policy is the ongoing effort to "save" the spotted owl by stopping logging in the Pacific Northwest.

Republicans and conservative Democrats tried to water down the bill, but with only marginal success. The House did approve several amendments that would protect the rights of private landowners on whose property Interior Department officials would collect data for the survey. One amendment by Rep. Billy Tauzin (D-La.) would ban the use of volunteers to conduct the survey, a measure which drew protest from John Echerria of the National Audubon Society, who complained that many environmentalists participate each year in compiling the Christmas "bird count."

Other attempts to limit the economic damage of the bill included a measure which would have required the NBS to research the economic impact of its own activities, and a measure which would have required gov-

ernment compensation to private property owners whose land value dropped more than 50% as a result of NBS activity. Both of these amendments were defeated.

Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) warned that the bill would give the interior secretary too much power over science and wildlife. Other legislators were more blunt. "This is a terrible, atrocious idea," said Rep. Jack Fields (R-Tex.). "It creates a monster, which will never be under control again." The Senate is expected to take up the bill next year.

### Impose sanctions on Iran, says D'Amato

On Oct. 25, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) introduced a bill which would impose economic sanctions against Iran. In his remarks on the Senate floor, D'Amato, noting the \$750 million in American exports to Iran, complained that export rules were making it "easier to slip dual-use material through the oversight process and for Iran to convert for use in its military and nuclear program."

D'Amato decried Iran's "territorial expansion" into North Africa and Central Asia, which he said was "being ignored" by U.S. policymakers. He listed several countries where allegedly Iranian-supported terrorists are active, warning, "Iran's spreading influence is indicative of a wider effort designed to build an anti-American bloc. This much has been alleged regarding suggestions of some Sudanese role in the bombing of the World Trade Center." He said that if the world wishes to avoid another Middle East war, "we must join together to take any and all steps necessary to prevent Iran from its goal of nuclear domination of the Middle East."

D'Amato urged severing "any re-

maining trade between the United States and Iran, to ensure that we do not provide them with anything that will come back to haunt us."

### Haiti policy, Aristide attacked by Republicans

A group of Republican congressmen, in a colloquy on the House floor on Oct. 27, criticized President Clinton's policy toward Haiti.

Rep. Tim Hutchinson (R-Ariz.) said that international sanctions had done nothing but destroy what little semblance of commerce there was in Haiti, and that it had led to "near starvation and an almost complete shut-down of Haiti's rudimentary health care system. . . . If the United States and the United Nations continue their present policy of sanctions, the likely result will be thousands of deaths from starvation and disease in Haiti, coupled with additional thousands of refugees teeming to United States shores in creaky boats." Certainly, the United States "has an interest in political events in Haiti," Hutchinson said, "but a series of crippling economic sanctions are not going to turn hardened military leaders away from their tyranny." Hutchinson emphasized the oppression and the "grinding poverty" that the Haitian people are suffering.

Rep. John Doolittle (R-Calif.) said that while there were problems in Haiti, there was nothing "which is a threat to the international peace and security," and therefore there was not sufficient justification for involvement of U.S. military forces.

Referring to the U.S. military occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) said that "not only does it seem that this administration does not understand what military power is, how it should be used, and in what way it should be

used. . . . Obviously they . . . have not even had any sort of historical perception or historical basis. I mean, it would seem to me that you would look back at the history of our involvement with Haiti and understand that you just cannot do what you are intending to do, that it did not work then, and it will not work now." DeLay cited the reports about Aristide, including his love of killing opponents by "necklacing" and his mental instability. "If I were going to send U.S. troops to Haiti," he remarked, "it would be to eradicate Aristide, not to install him back as the President."

## **C**Crime Bill dumped over death penalty

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks (D-Tex.), in the face of adamant opposition from Democratic freshmen and members of the Congressional Black Caucus on the committee, decided on Oct. 28 to scrap the Omnibus Crime Bill, which would have expanded the use of the death penalty to 64 federal crimes and placed restrictions on federal court appeals by death row inmates.

Provisions of the bill will now be dealt with individually. One item, the five-day waiting period on handgun purchases, the so-called Brady Bill, was passed on a 10-3 vote by the Crime subcommittee on Oct. 29 and sent to the full committee. The bill calls for local police to run background checks on gun buyers during the waiting period to see if they have criminal records or mental problems. The measure has been strongly opposed by the National Rifle Association.

Other measures which will be taken up separately include the proposed grants of \$3.4 billion over six years to

cities to pay for 50,000 more police officers, federal grants for drug treatment programs, setting up military-style boot camps for young offenders, educational programs, and anti-gang efforts.

## **N** NAFTA close to defeat, says Bonior

At a press conference on Capitol Hill on Oct. 26, House Majority Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.) estimated that opponents of the North American Free Trade Agreement were within 10 "solid votes" of the 218 necessary to defeat the agreement in the House, although the Clinton administration is in a full-court press to get legislators to support it. A vote on the pact is set for Nov. 17.

"We're picking up a few each day," Bonior said, "and we expect we'll have the number that we need some time within the next week."

Bonior stated that Canadians had "sent a clear and a powerful message" against NAFTA in the recent elections, which saw the victory of Liberal Party candidate Jean Chrétien as prime minister. Chrétien has been calling for NAFTA to be renegotiated.

## **F**ilibuster continues to stall grazing fee hike

Senators opposed to administration plans to raise grazing fees for western ranchers, have so far blocked the legislation with a filibuster. The grazing fee increase, the brain-child of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, is one of a number of measures intended to encourage more "environmentally friendly" grazing practices on federal land, and is part of a \$13.4 billion

spending bill covering the Department of Interior.

The Senate leadership has failed to mobilize the 60 votes needed to break the filibuster. The measure would raise the current grazing fee of \$1.86 per "animal unit month" to \$3.45. An animal unit month is the forage needed to feed a cow and calf, a horse, or five sheep for a month. Babbitt is now warning that if the impasse continues, he will use his administrative powers to impose his original proposal for tougher environmental standards on ranchers, including allowing environmentalists a role in rangeland planning and tying the length of grazing permits to how ranchers treat the land.

## **B**ipartisan group pushes greater budget cuts

Reps. John Kasich (R-Ohio) and Tim Penny (D-Minn.) announced on Oct. 27, one day after President Clinton unveiled about \$10 billion in proposed spending cuts over the next five years, an alternative which includes more cuts than the Clinton program. "This package represents the sorts of choices that need to be made if we are to seriously cut the deficit," Penny said.

More than one-quarter of the additional savings claimed for their proposal would come from a cut in the federal work force by 252,000. They claim that this will generate \$26.7 billion in savings.

The Kasich-Penny proposal would require European nations to assume an additional \$5 billion of defense costs now paid by the United States, defer \$5.5 billion in cost-of-living adjustments for military retirees until age 62, and tighten up home health services and clinical lab services for those on Medicare, for a savings of \$25 billion.