

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Supermajority on taxes unlikely to pass

Despite claims by House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.), it is unlikely that Republican leaders will be able to attach a so-called supermajority clause to the proposed balanced budget amendment sponsored by Joe Barton (R-Tex.). The provision would require a three-fifths vote in order to raise taxes. A three-fifths requirement would make it extremely difficult to legislate any tax hike.

The Barton version will be brought to a vote prior to an alternative which does not contain the supermajority clause sponsored by Rep. Dan Schaefer (R-Colo.) and 65 Democrats led by "boll weevil" Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.). If, as expected, the Barton bill fails, some Republicans may not vote for what they consider a weaker alternative. GOP leaders, in a last-minute effort, intend to bring in talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh to broadcast from the Capitol to mobilize their minions behind the Barton bill.

A balanced budget amendment without the supermajority was voted out of the Senate Judiciary Committee by a vote of 15-3 on Jan. 18.

Crime bill may become even more draconian

The House Judiciary's subcommittee on crime began hearings on Jan. 20 to revamp the Crime bill passed by Congress last year. Republicans are pushing even more draconian law enforcement and punitive measures than those in last year's bill, as part of their Contract with America.

The Republican proposals would eliminate almost all of the crime prevention programs in last year's bill, further toughen standards for appealing convictions, and appropriate in-

creased funding for construction of more prisons. "We need to play hardball with the criminal element and we're not doing that," said Fred Heineman (R-N.C.).

In line with Republican attempts to dismantle the federal government, their proposals would give more leeway for local governments to do as they see fit in crime prevention. As subcommittee Chairman Bill McCollum (R-Fla.) put it, to get "the federal government out of the way of state and local law enforcement."

Ironically, the proposal would eliminate the deployment of an additional 100,000 policemen, a measure approved as part of last year's bill, and would put the funding for this into block grants to be allocated as states see fit.

Meek remarks on Gingrich book deal provoke brawl

A two-hour verbal slug-fest interrupted normal business in the House on Jan. 18, when Carrie P. Meek (D-Fla.) criticized Speaker Newt Gingrich's (R-Ga.) multimillion-dollar book deal with Rupert Murdoch's HarperCollins publishing firm. Some of Meek's comments, those which brought new aspects of the deal to light, were stricken from the *Congressional Record* by a vote of 217-178.

Meek began: "The Speaker's unbelievably good book deal—after all the secret meetings and behind the scene deal-making, which with each new day brings to light new and more startling revelations, I am still not satisfied with the answers I am getting about this very large and very lucrative book deal our Speaker has negotiated for himself.

"Now more than ever before the perception of impropriety, not to men-

tion the potential conflict of interest, still exist, and cannot be ignored."

Her following three sentences were stricken: "News accounts tell us that while the Speaker may have given up a \$4.5 million advance, he stands to gain that amount and much more in royalties. Where I come from, that's a lot of dust [money].

"If anything, *now*, how much the Speaker earns has grown much more dependent upon how hard his publishing house hawks his book!"

She concluded on the record: "Which leads me to the question of exactly who does this Speaker *really* work for—is it the American people or his New York publishing house?"

Robert Walker (R-Pa.) defended the deletion on Jan. 19, despite GOP demands over the years that the record not be amended, in the name of openness to the public. "There was no gagging. [The] rule . . . has been in effect since the early days. . . . It says you cannot engage in personal attacks." Walker threatened that if Democrats persisted, the Mexican bailout could be defeated.

"Gridlock has been replaced on the floor of this body by totalitarianism," said Melvin Watt (D-N.C.).

Missile defense again on the drawing board

Missile defense systems are getting a new lease on life, as Republicans on defense committees in both houses have pledged to revitalize funding for missile defense research. House and Senate Republican leaders have begun private meetings on an accelerated missile defense schedule that would include examining available technologies for interceptors and warhead sensors.

Rep. Curt Weldon (R-Pa.), chair-

man of the House National Security subcommittee on research and development, indicated that he was close to a decision to resurrect a national missile defense system, but said that he wanted to hear testimony from Pentagon experts first. But the big question is how much Republicans are willing to spend.

The Pentagon currently plans to spend \$17.6 billion on missile defense over the next five years, with \$11.6 billion for theater defenses and \$5.9 billion for national defense. The first step, according to GOP aides, will be to revive efforts to deploy 100 interceptors at one U.S. site (which is allowed under the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty). The plan is more modest than the proposal developed by physical economist Lyndon LaRouche and announced by President Reagan on March 23, 1983, which became known as the Strategic Defense Initiative, but it is expected to include both land- and space-based elements.

Welfare proposal would cut benefits to immigrants

Conservative Republicans are shifting tactics after coming under attack for proposing that legal immigrants be cut off from welfare benefits. They are attempting now to pass the buck to the states, under the cover of the Contract with America's defederalization approach. They will leave it up to the states to decide if or how much they would spend on welfare benefits for legal immigrants.

House Ways and Means human relations subcommittee chairman Clay Shaw (R-Fla.), while insisting that cutting such benefits is still the best policy, said, "We don't want to be the heavies on anti-immigration or anti-poor people, or anti-anybody."

Nevertheless, he admits that implementing the Contract with America will require big cuts in precisely these types of outlays.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee Chairman Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) have both said that the Senate would not pass legislation which would cut off benefits to legal immigrants or to unwed mothers under the age of 18. The House may try, Kassebaum said, "but it looks to me as if it's already running into trouble over there."

Budget amendment called 'monstrous hoax'

Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) called the proposed balanced budget amendment a "monstrous hoax" which legislators are "about to perpetrate on the American people," in an interview on Fox TV on Jan. 19.

"I'm not against amending the Constitution," Byrd said. "I have voted to amend it. But here, we will be amending in a way that has never been amended. We'll be inscribing into that Constitution fiscal policy, which the Founding Fathers thought it well to leave up to the elected representatives of the people to make judgments on. And I think we're doing great harm to the Constitution. But basically and most fundamentally, we'll be fooling the American people.

"Eighty percent of [Americans] now have been led to believe that a constitutional amendment is the way to balance the budget. But once they are asked the question, 'Would you favor the balanced budget if it cuts veterans pensions, veterans compensation, education, Medicare, Social Security?' then they pull away from it.

"And those who advocate a consti-

tutional amendment on the balanced budget have the duty, I think, to look the American people in the eye and to tell the American people where this budget is going to have to be cut, what programs are going to have to be cut, what taxes are going to have to be raised, by how much taxes are going to have to be raised, in order to reach a balanced budget in that seven-year period. . . . Otherwise it's dishonest, it's misleading, it's untruthful, and it's arrogant."

Curbs expected on United Nations funding

Republican leaders in both the House and the Senate have introduced the "National Security Revitalization Act of 1995," which is part of the so-called Contract with America, which would restrict funding for U.N. operations by deducting from the overall U.N. payments the total cost of any indirect U.S. military expenditures for U.N.-related operations. Consideration of the bill, H.R. 7 in the House, began in the House International Relations Committee on Jan. 26.

The bill would credit the United States for the \$1.2 billion it spends on military operations connected to embargoes, "no-fly" zones, and humanitarian relief. It would bar the deployment of U.S. troops under foreign command without specific congressional or presidential authorization, and would require the administration to provide regular reports to Congress on the costs and funding mechanisms for all U.N. peacekeeping operations. It would also withhold one-fifth of the U.S. payments to the United Nations until the U.N. inspector general obtains powers to investigate a wider range of U.N. documents and programs—another reform demanded by the United States.