

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Dole does turnabout on affirmative action

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) has made a repeal of affirmative action programs a key part of his election campaign for the 1996 GOP nomination for President.

Sen. Phil Gramm (D-Tex.), Dole's chief rival for the nomination, came out against affirmative action programs when he announced his presidential bid in February. Gramm said that if elected President, he would repeal all quotas and set-asides that favor minorities. Dole now says that he will do the same, but this year.

While Dole was earlier a supporter of affirmative action programs, which aim at eliminating job discrimination, a policy launched under President Lyndon Johnson and expanded during the Nixon administration, Dole has now targeted these programs for elimination. He has ordered a congressional report on all such government programs, and has asked two committee chairmen to hold hearings to examine the issue. Dole has said that he will introduce bills that would ban the federal government from "granting preferential treatment to any person simply because of his or her membership in a certain favored group."

In initial action on a related measure, the Senate Finance Committee on March 9 voted to end a tax deferral for businesses that sell broadcast licenses to blacks, Hispanics, or other minorities. Similar legislation has been introduced in the House.

Teller calls for manned lunar base

Speaking before the House Science Committee on March 16 on NASA's Mission to Planet Earth, Dr. Edward Teller made a personal plea for the development of a manned lunar base.

"There *are* cases where man is needed in space," such as on the Moon, Teller told committee members.

Teller displayed a detailed image of the Moon recently taken by the Clementine spacecraft. "I would like to suggest a manned station of half a dozen people with the occupants being rotated every several months or perhaps longer," he said. "For the location of this station, I recommend the bottom of the deep basin near the South Pole of the Moon." Teller has proposed that the Moon's poles may contain water ice, and photographs from Clementine were consistent with this hypothesis.

Teller stated that "the final result may be that a manned lunar station would be a wonderful source of scientific information both about the Moon and about the universe. In addition, the Moon may be developed to serve as a refueling station for space exploration." Teller said he did not want to "belittle the interest in the human exploration of Mars," but pointed out that the Moon is hundreds of times closer to the Earth and the next step for a manned base. "With focused international effort commencing soon, a permanent lunar colony could be established in this decade at a total cost well under \$10 billion."

Teller also advocated the deployment of "at least several hundred small satellites in near-Earth space" that would make use of the past decade's developments in electronics, and would take on-site measurements of the most important atmospheric conditions.

Little hope seen for term limits passage

House Republican leaders announced plans on March 15 for floor consideration later in the month of at least three

versions of a constitutional amendment limiting the terms of members of Congress. Proponents acknowledge that they face an uphill fight to win the required two-thirds majority, and called for a grass-roots lobbying campaign.

Republicans promised a vote on term limits in their Contract with America, but delayed a vote in the face of a likely embarrassing defeat.

Majority Leader Richard Arney (R-Tex.) told reporters on March 21 that the House would debate term limits on March 27-28. Under the plan, the House will consider two proposals calling for limits of six two-year terms in the House and two six-year terms in the Senate—one of which would allow states to set lower limits. There will also be a proposal limiting House membership to six years, and possibly a Democratic alternative.

Clinton sustained on boycott of scabs

Senate Democrats successfully defended President Clinton's March 8 Executive Order forbidding federal government contracts with firms that permanently replace striking workers. Republicans fell two votes short of the 60 needed to end the filibuster against Republican attempts to kill it. The filibuster prevented a vote on an amendment offered by Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) that would have prohibited the Labor Department from using appropriated money to administer or enforce the order.

Facing defeat in a second attempt to end the filibuster on March 16, GOP leaders decided to move on to other business.

Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) said, "President Clinton has a right to issue his Executive Order, and we intend to defend it in the Senate as often as we

have to. . . . We're not going to be rolled over and stampeded." Labor Secretary Robert Reich told a local TV interviewer that "if you allow permanent replacement of striking workers . . . it eliminates the strike as an instrument."

Draconian rescissions bill passes House

After two days of debate, House Republicans succeeded on March 17 in gaining passage of a \$17.3 billion package of rescissions from the mid-year budget. In a 227-200 vote, the House approved the package of cuts over the next five years.

House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio) said just prior to the vote that he intended to use the savings to finance the GOP tax reduction plan. Some members were furious, because they had been given to believe that all the savings would go to deficit reduction. Some conservative Democrats then decided to vote against the measure.

"We've heard the same rhetoric about compassion," said Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.), who, as chairman of the House Rules Committee, played an important role in its passage. "If we don't make these cuts and more, we're going to add another trillion to our \$4.5 trillion national debt."

Nearly half the reductions would come from welfare programs and Medicare; \$1.6 billion would come from a cut in home heating subsidies. Other cuts include foreign aid.

Before any cuts become law, the measure faces a tougher challenge in the Senate and the likelihood of a veto by President Clinton. Before a conference of state legislators, Clinton criticized the rescissions, saying that they would "cut too much people and not enough pork."

Even many Republicans are concerned that their tax cut will backfire as people begin to feel the impact of the cuts. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.), at a meeting with fellow committee members and Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin in Maryland on the weekend of March 18, came out opposing any tax cut, saying that he wants to "make deficit reduction the first priority." Packwood says that he wants Social Security on the table as a target for reductions.

Line-item veto considered in Senate

Republican senators have reached agreement on a strategy for pushing a line-item veto, and are threatening to hang the issue around the necks of Democrats if they filibuster the legislation. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a key supporter of the bill, agrees that the vote will be "a close call."

Although the President is in favor of a line-item veto, some Democrats support a milder approach than that proposed by Republicans. A filibuster by Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), who questions the constitutionality of a line-item veto, is likely. "It would be up to the President" to win Democratic votes for the legislation," warned Majority Whip Trent Lott (R-Miss.).

Bob Dole (R-Kan.) put his own spin on the fight, saying, "I guess [if] it's a choice between passing something he always supported or denying Republicans a legislative victory, then the line-item veto will probably be sacrificed on the altar of politics."

In the more radical GOP version, appropriations bills would be passed as they are now, but then broken up into each individual item. As with reg-

ular appropriations bills, it would require a two-thirds majority of both houses to override a presidential veto, a considerable strengthening of Executive power.

Republicans seek harsher measures vs. Iran

Senate Banking Committee Republicans, in grilling Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff on March 16, called for harsher measures against Iran, including penalizing foreign subsidiaries of American companies trading with Iran. "How do we allow these foreign governments to think that we're serious about this when indeed we permit \$4 billion [in trade] and . . . we are facilitating it with U.S. companies," complained Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.).

When a \$1 billion deal between Conoco and Iran to exploit Iran's oil resources was made public, Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, flew to Washington to meet with House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), and Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A few days later, President Clinton issued an Executive Order blocking American firms from financing, supervising, or managing oil development projects in Iran, effectively killing the deal.

Tarnoff said that the deal had taken the administration by surprise. When they learned of it, they quickly moved to squelch it. D'Amato has introduced legislation that would create a trade embargo and ban the purchase of Iranian oil by American subsidiaries abroad. The moves come in the context of a British-orchestrated campaign to make "militant Islam" the West's new "enemy image."