

## **Congressional Closeup** by William Jones

### **GOPers suffer setback on regulatory reform**

Senate Republicans conceded defeat on July 21 on a sweeping regulatory reform bill that compromised one of the key points of House Speaker Newt Gingrich's (R-Ga.) Contract with America. On July 20, for the third time, they were unable to mobilize enough votes to override a Democratic filibuster. It was the fourth major setback in the attempt to pass the Contract program. A considerably tougher bill had been approved by the House earlier this year.

The bill would have curbed federal regulatory agencies and made it easier for businesses to challenge regulations. It would have required regulatory agencies to meet cost-benefit and risk-assessment tests before issuing new rules that put a significant burden on small businesses or cost larger businesses more than \$100 million a year.

### **House scores China for rights violations**

The House voted 416-10 on July 20 for a proposal that would rebuke China for human rights violations and would launch Radio Free Asia broadcasts into that country. The legislation requires the President to report every six months on diplomatic initiatives to improve China's record on human rights.

The move comes at a time of worsening relations between the United States and China. China had postponed a number of high-level meetings with U.S. officials following the private visit of President of Taiwan Lee Teng-hui to the United States in June. The administration agreed to issue President Lee a visa after conservative Republicans, led by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman

Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), began pressuring the administration to allow him to attend a class reunion at his alma mater, Cornell University. The administration stated repeatedly that the visit was only "of a private nature" and did not represent any change in U.S. policy, which recognizes only "one China."

Chinese authorities then arrested Chinese-American human rights activist Harry Wu, while he was on a visit to China. Wu, a protégé of Helms, has authored numerous exposés about the Chinese use of prison labor.

Some members called for even harsher measures against China. One resolution, which would have overridden President Clinton's granting of Most Favored Nation trade status to China, was defeated by a vote of 321-107. Other legislators, conscious of the importance of relations with China, cautioned against overreacting. The measure will now go to the Senate.

House Republicans have also introduced legislation that would bar federal funding for a U.S. delegation to the September U.N. women's conference in Beijing.

### **Senate passes modified rescissions bill**

The Senate passed on July 21, by a vote of 90-7, a bill that cuts spending in 1995 by \$16.5 billion. The bill was first offered in February but was vetoed by President Clinton (the only veto of his administration) on June 7, because the Senate had eliminated \$772 million for education, safe drinking water, and other programs deemed important by the President. The new legislation restored many of those cuts and is expected to be signed into law.

Other measures under consideration, however, would impose even harsher cuts on some of the President's programs. The House Appropriations Committee has approved a bill eliminating funding for President Clinton's Goals 2000 education reforms, the AmeriCorps national volunteer service, and the Community Development Financial Institutions program, which channels bank loans to low-income areas.

In a speech to Boys' Nation on July 24, the President stressed his concern over any cuts in education assistance, Medicare, or environmental protection. "I invite senators and members of Congress from both parties to join me in balancing the budget while protecting our common ground," he said. "I will work hard to get their support, but if they refuse, I must continue to act, alone if necessary, to protect the common ground that brought every single one of you into this White House today."

Boys' Nation was formed in 1946 by the American Legion, to create opportunities for young boys from low-income families. Clinton met President Kennedy while he was a member of a Boys' Nation delegation to Washington in the 1960s.

### **Mexico aid package hurt in House**

In a direct affront to the Clinton administration, the House voted 245-183 on July 19 to halt U.S. support for the peso effective Oct. 1, the beginning of fiscal year 1996. The action would not affect the money that has already been disbursed.

The amendment halting the support for the peso was added to a FY 1996 spending bill for the Treasury, Postal Service, and other agen-

cies that the House approved by a vote of 216-211. The measure was sponsored by Bernard Sanders (Vt.), an independent and the only Socialist in Congress, who said that Congress should be allowed to vote on such a huge expenditure. More than 150 Republicans joined 88 Democrats in support of the amendment, which would forbid the administration from tapping the Treasury Department currency-stabilization fund that has been used for \$12.5 billion in loans, loan guarantees, and currency swaps to bolster the Mexican currency. President Clinton had been forced to utilize the fund when faced with a refusal by the Republican-dominated Congress to appropriate any funds for a Mexican rescue package.

The measure must now go to the Senate, where it is expected to face more difficulties; Senate Banking Committee Chairman Al D'Amato (R-N.Y.) has threatened to block the funds there.

## **D**emocrats rally behind Medicare, Social Security

House Democrats rallied on Capitol Hill on the 30th anniversary of the signing of the legislation for Medicare, in support of maintaining the hard-won social legislation, now threatened by the Republican Congress.

John Dingell (D-Mich.) carried with him the same gavel he had used when he presided over the passage of the Medicare legislation 30 years ago. Dingell warned that the Republicans were intent on turning back the clock on these landmarks of social legislation. "I'm charging you today to make sure the Republicans face this issue," he told his Democratic compatriots. "Don't let them tell you that they're

not going to cut Medicare, because they are. And they're going to do it to give a tax cut to the rich."

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) said that the last election should not encourage the Republicans to dismantle the Medicare system. "There was nothing about the last election that said to the Congress of the United States, cut back on the Medicare so you can have major tax cuts for the wealthiest corporations and individuals in this country. There was nothing in the last election that said, raise the deductibles, raise the co-payments, raise the premiums for our senior citizens. There was nothing there and we are not going to let them do it to us," he said.

President Clinton said, "Two-thirds of the Medicaid budget goes for older Americans and disabled citizens. Without Medicaid, middle-class families struggling to pay their own bills and raise and educate their children could face nursing home bills for their parents averaging \$38,000 a year." Addressing the large group of seniors attending the rally, Clinton said, "I remember what those nursing homes looked like before Medicaid. Some of you do, too."

## **D**raconian welfare reform proposal crafted

Conservative Senate Republicans on July 20 presented details of a new welfare reform plan they intend to introduce soon in preparation for the pending floor debate on the issue. The new bill would create nine block-grant funding programs for such welfare benefits as cash, food stamps, job training, and housing. It would channel funds to states directly from the Treasury, bypassing federal agencies.

Although there is one welfare reform bill, introduced by Bob Pack-

wood (R-Ore.), already under consideration in the Senate, conservative Republicans don't believe the legislation is draconian enough. The new bill would also require 75% of all able-bodied welfare recipients to work, and would cut off benefits to children born to families already receiving welfare, to teenage mothers, and to mothers who fail to establish their children's paternity. It would also provide block grants for the school-lunch program and child-welfare services.

Conservative Revolution honcho Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) called the bill "incredibly progressive." The bill is sponsored by Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), who is anxious to bolster his conservative credentials for his rapidly fading Presidential bid.

## **W**irth calls Biodiversity Treaty 'top priority'

Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Tim Wirth, speaking at a forum at Stanford University in California, called the controversial Biodiversity Treaty a "top priority among all treaties." Wirth underscored that ratification of this environmentalist monstrosity was essential to the implementation of the environmentalists' global strategy.

However, Wirth seems to be fighting a losing battle. The treaty is expected to go nowhere in the U.S. Senate, where it awaits confirmation, and the administration, not as prone to environmentalist "radicalism" as Wirth may wish, has eliminated some of the more onerous restrictions the Environmental Protection Agency had previously imposed.

*EIR* exposés of the treaty last year contributed to a popular groundswell that prompted more than 35 senators to request that the treaty not be brought to a vote.