

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Byrd Frustrated Over Transportation Security

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) held hearings on May 2, and expressed frustration with the slowness of the homeland security efforts of the Bush Administration, including the refusal of Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge to testify before any Congressional committee.

Byrd reported that his committee has learned “that while the American people expect their homeland security to be an absolute, at this point, it is nothing more than an aspiration. . . . Homeland security priorities are mired in conflicting department missions,” while the one person who has “the responsibility and the authority to cut through that conflict and to help resolve those turf battles is gagged by his own administration.” He pointed out that, at the same time as his hearing, Ridge was scheduled to give an open briefing to Senators on border security, which Byrd called an “apparently orchestrated event.”

Byrd’s first witness was Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, with whom Byrd especially took up the issue of port security. Byrd demanded to know why the Bush Administration’s fiscal year 2003 budget request terminates a \$93 million grant program for port security when there has been more than \$700 million in applications for that program. Mineta replied that while the applications cover three areas—vulnerability assessments, proof of concept, and construction of facilities—he is only interested in dealing with facilities and perimeter security. Byrd, unsatisfied, continued to badger Mineta on port security and finally secured a commitment from him for an interim report from the Department’s working group on shipping containers.

Another concern related to propo-

sals to merge the Coast Guard with other agencies for homeland security. Ted Stevens (R-Ak.) said that the Coast Guard is more than just a security agency, but also has maritime safety and search and rescue as part of its mission. He said that the Coast Guard probably delivers more babies “than most ambulances in major cities.”

### Defense Authorization Bill Passes House Panel

On May 1, the House Armed Services Committee passed, by a vote of 57 to 1, the fiscal year 2003 Defense Authorization bill. It provides \$383.4 billion for the “core” defense program for FY 2003. The war on terrorism is to be covered by a separate \$10 billion bill that the committee did not complete action on. The defense bill provides for increases over and above the Bush Administration’s fiscal year 2003 budget request in several areas, including adding \$4.6 billion to readiness accounts, \$3.2 billion extra for procurement, and \$550 million to cover the costs of an increase in personnel strength by more than 12,000 people.

Other provisions cover defending against weapons of mass destruction, missile defense, a military pay increase, and a request to the Defense Department (DOD) to present to Congress with a baseline nuclear force structure plan and budget by Jan. 1, 2003. The latter is a response to the Nuclear Posture Review, on which the Congress was briefed last January, which did not provide a plan, nor specify numbers and types of warheads to be retained.

Most of the drama surrounding the bill was provided by the dispute over the Army’s Crusader artillery system, which has been under development

since 1994. The day before the committee mark-up, the Pentagon let it be known that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld intended to cancel the Crusader pending a 30-day review. The Army lobbied the committee to save it, with a reported “talking points” paper that called the Crusader crucial to Army transformation. The committee responded by placing language in the bill directing the DOD to maintain the program and submit a report to the committee by March 1, 2003 on its progress along with an analysis of alternatives.

On the Senate side, James Inhofe (R-Okla.), a member of the Armed Services Committee in whose state the Crusader is to be built, called the Crusader “an important part of the Army’s long-delayed modernization needs,” and vowed that the fight for the Crusader “will continue in the Congress.”

### Trade Bill Bogs Down Over Health Insurance Dispute

The Senate completed its first full week of debate on the trade bill on May 3 with partisan squabbling over trade adjustment assistance. The Senate bill is in three parts, the first of which provides trade promotion authority, or what used to be called “fast track,” to the President; the second amends the existing Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Act; and the third is an extension of the generalized system of preferences.

While Senators have many concerns about the bill, the one with the potential to scuttle it is a Democratic provision for extending health-care benefits to workers who lose their jobs as a result of free trade. As described by Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), the provision would subsidize 73% of the costs of

health insurance for such workers. Baucus said that such assistance is supported by the Trade Deficit Review Commission, a bipartisan body. Baucus told the Senate, "We have not done enough in this country to help those workers displaced because of trade. That is why a comprehensive bill, one that includes both fast track and TAA, is so important."

However, Ranking Finance Committee member Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) complained that the Democrats are taking a "take it or leave it" approach, in contrast to the committee version, which was approved by an 18 to 3 vote four months ago. "When we finally seemed to be making progress in getting trade authority legislation to the floor," he said, "we were told the only way we could have this debate was if we agreed to partisan trade adjustment assistance legislation with which many members on our side of the aisle disagree."

Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) told reporters on May 2 that knocking out the health insurance provision "would be the death knell of the trade bill."

## **W**elfare Reform Debated in Senate

On May 2, the Brookings Institution sponsored a discussion forum on welfare reform that featured several Senators, including John Breaux (D-La.), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), and Evan Bayh (D-Ind.). Each offered slightly different approaches, but the common denominator was to build on the 1996 welfare reform, which has been praised for its massive reduction of the welfare rolls.

Another theme was to move people into work, as opposed to emphasis on reducing the welfare rolls. Breaux

said that his proposal, which is co-sponsored by Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), among others, eliminates the caseload reduction credit of the 1996 bill and replaces it with a "workable employment credit" which provides incentives only "to states and parents that end up truly working." He had earlier said that no one in the Senate wants to be perceived as "being weak on work." Where the proposals tend to diverge is on the number of work hours required of participants in the program.

Santorum, who is working with Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) on faith-based legislation, praised Bayh, who is chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council, and Breaux for working within the framework of the 1996 bill. "What we don't want to do," he said, "is turn back to the entitlement nature of the old AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children, i.e., "welfare"] program."

One issue not raised is how welfare recipients are going to hold on to jobs when even the official unemployment statistics, as faked as they are, are showing unemployment to be increasing. Rather than economic realities, the presumption, as Bayh put it, is the degree to which a welfare recipient "wants to work hard and play by the rules."

## **F**arm Bill Conference Report Clears House

On May 2, the House passed, by a vote of 280 to 141, the conference report on the farm bill, a bill which nearly everyone who spoke on it acknowledged is not a perfect bill. Nick Smith (R-Mich.) voted for the bill but complained that it includes a loophole where "mega-farms can receive millions of dollars in price support" that

is only going to benefit a handful of states in the South. Smith supported a motion offered by Ron Kind (D-Wisc.) to recommit the bill to conference committee to agree to a Senate amendment limiting such price supports to \$275,000. That motion failed by a vote of 251 to 172.

The fact that the bill replaces many of the free-market-oriented provisions of the 1996 "Freedom to Farm" bill was not the only factor that generated opposition. Greg Ganske (R-Iowa) echoed Smith's complaints when he told the House that the bill "favors large Southern producers of cotton and rice" and is so full of loopholes that it does not even qualify as a step forward. He said that the Senate proposal to ban meat packer ownership of livestock was not even discussed in conference.

Senate consideration of the bill has been delayed by GOP desires to debate it more fully than was allowed in the House. On May 7, Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) warned the GOP not to block the bill. If they were to do that, for electoral or other reasons, he said, "it would probably be the best thing they could do for every Midwestern Senate candidate on the Democratic side. . . . There are regions of the country where this is one of the most important economic policy questions our country will face for the year."

Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) told reporters on May 7 that he did not think it was a very good bill, but he was going to vote for it anyway. He acknowledged that farmers have had difficult times in recent years, but attributed that to weather-related problems, rather than low commodities prices. As for the complaints about "loopholes," "I come from a state where we take a little different view of on that," he said.