

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda and Susan Kokinda

House approves Agriculture Productivity Act

The House of Representatives passed the Agricultural Productivity Act of 1983, which emphasizes "organic" methods of farming and energy production, by a vote of 206 to 184 on Jan. 26. Rather than meeting the crisis in agriculture by increasing low-interest credit flows to high-technology farmers, the House has opted for the "resource conservation" policy emphasized by the Carter administration.

The primary sponsor of the bill is Rep. James Weaver (D-Ore.), one of the most rabid environmentalists and population-control advocates in the House. The great increases in food production by American agriculture were "due, in large part, to rapid technological advances in machinery, plant-germ plasm, and fertilizers," Weaver conceded in motivating his bill. However, he continued, "we now live in an era of limits—limited soil, limited water, and limited energy."

Agricultural Committee chairman Kiki de la Garza (D-Tex.) claimed that conservation was a responsible answer to the disaster in U.S. agriculture. "Although American farmers are the most productive in the world," he said, "our agricultural system faces an uncertain future. Tried and true farm programs are in disarray, production costs are rising sharply, soil erosion is increasing at an alarming rate . . . many farmers are looking to the [Agriculture] Department for technical advice. . . . [The program will collect data] about the effects of a transition from energy-intensive farming practices to organic-type farming systems."

The bill, H.R. 2714, would authorize a \$10.5 million, five-year program for the Department of Agriculture. It would establish 12 on-farm pilot research projects and conduct an

extension program for American farmers to "promote the understanding of such farming systems." It also authorizes financial assistance to farmers who utilize intercropping systems to establish vegetative cover to reduce soil erosion.

Not one of the opponents of the legislation attacked the bill on grounds of its economic or scientific inadequacies, or its no-growth outlook; they concentrated rather on its cost and claimed that it duplicated programs that the DOA was already conducting.

The DOA opposed the bill; it may not pass the Senate.

Armed Services Committee fixates on budgets

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, excepting only chairman John Tower (R-Tex.) and Pete Wilson (R-Calif.), let budget-cutting hysteria dominate their questioning of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger at hearings on the defense budget on Feb. 1.

The questions from most of the committee were dominated by the stupidity of the "limited budget" mentality. Most disturbing was the approach of the new ranking Democrat on the committee, Sam Nunn (Ga.). Nunn took that position after the defense hardliner Henry Jackson, who maintained a bipartisan defense policy, died last fall. Nunn's pro-defense reputation was exploded at the Feb. 1 hearing when he announced in his opening statement that the Defense Department must submit to the budget cuts to be made by the Congress.

Nunn's next argument—that the United States does not have a coherent strategic policy because the country has not based its strategy on realistically available resources—was identical to that advanced by Gen. Max-

well Taylor (ret.), according to Capitol Hill observers.

"Within limited resources," Nunn asked, "what are the most important priorities? I think that our commitments have outpaced our capabilities." Throughout his exchanges with Weinberger and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman John Vessey, Nunn argued that the United States must "close the gap between capabilities and resources,"—by which he actually means cut back on capabilities.

Nunn's accomplice in pushing the suicidal "build down" proposal, William Cohen (R-Me.), questioned Weinberger on Reagan's strategic defense initiative. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) evinced concern about the expense of the strategic defense initiative. The KGB-allied Democrats on the committee, including Ted Kennedy (Mass.) and Carl Levin (Mich.) went so far as to charge that the United States has outspent the Soviets on defense during the last decade.

Pro-defense Republicans such as John Warner (R-Va.) and Gordon Humphrey (R-N.H.) who are likely to vote to support strategic weapons systems, asked foolish questions about saving money by stealing technology from the Soviets and about "winning over public opinion" by emphasizing the differences between nuclear warheads and weapons delivery systems.

With the ascension of Nunn, the membership of the Senate Armed Services Committee does not auger well for the U.S. defense budget.

Melcher proposes food aid, cooperation with Philippines

Montana Democratic Sen. John Melcher, who traveled to the Philippines and met with President Ferdinand Marcos in December, is urging an increase in food aid to that nation

and closer U.S.-Philippines strategic cooperation. Melcher has, however, tied his proposals to demands for "human rights" reform which could exacerbate the ongoing destabilization of the Philippines government. Observers suggested that Melcher might be "in over his head" in his dealings with certain political elements in the Philippines.

In a letter addressed to Marcos on Jan. 19, Melcher wrote, "I saw our goals for our visit to be twofold: first, the use of food aid from the U.S. to the Philippines to meet urgent and immediate needs, to be followed by long-term concessionary and barter trade arrangements. Secondly, a need to enhance joint defense efforts between the U.S. and the Philippines for our mutual interests and the defense of Southeast Asia." While in the Philippines, Melcher warned of the growing Soviet forces in the region and the apparent neglect by the Reagan administration of the potential of developing the Pacific Basin region. He also attacked the role of the International Monetary Fund in undercutting the Philippines' economy.

But Melcher tied his proposal to certain "human rights" reforms—a tactic often used by the Carter administration to deny developing sector countries nuclear energy and other types of economic aid. "I wish to do everything possible to persuade our Congress and our government to move immediately on the matters of our mutual interest, but my credibility in being persuasive hinges directly on the Philippine government's credibility on these very points that the opposition raises [about individual freedoms]."

Melcher intends to travel to Mexico in February to make a similar proposal to extend food aid. "We have mountains of surplus commodities, enough to meet the needs of our own hungry people and the hungry of long-

time trading partners such as the Philippines and Mexico, as well as Central America and Africa."

Helms: counter Soviets with Manhattan Project

Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) called on the Reagan administration to respond to the pattern of Soviet arms control violations by embarking on a program for land- and space-based defense of the U.S. missile force with "Manhattan Project urgency." Helms was speaking from the Senate floor on Feb. 1. He added that "an effective ABM defense is the only thing that can save America in this hour of danger," and endorsed a recent statement by columnist Pat Buchanan that "not too far ahead, probably, lies the greatest confrontation of the Cold War, with Moscow holding the high cards."

The occasion for Helms's remarks was President Reagan's delivery to the Senate of a report detailing the record of Soviet treaty violations. The report itself was prompted by the efforts of Helms and senators such as Jim McClure and Steve Symms, both Idaho Republicans, to make the administration admit to the magnitude of Soviet violations.

In a letter dispatched to the White House on Jan. 26, those senators and Roger Jepsen (R-Iowa), Jeremiah Denton (R-Ala.), Orrin Hatch (R-Ut.), Bob Kasten (R-Wis.) and Larry Pressler (R-S.D.) urged a "further public report on some serious new Soviet violations of the SALT II Treaty reported recently in the press." The letter also describes newly reported violations of the ABM treaty, which have been characterized by *Aviation Week* magazine as presaging a Soviet ABM "breakout."

On the day of the Helms speech, the Senate held a classified briefing on

the President's report. Prior to that briefing a series of executive session briefings on overall U.S.-Soviet relations and the "worldwide intelligence" situation was delivered to select Senate committees by CIA Director William Colby and other intelligence officials.

Packwood wants to abolish 'equal access'

Political spokesmen's ability to gain access to national television time is under attack by Senate Commerce Committee chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.). Packwood has introduced S.1917, called the "Freedom of Expression Act."

The legislation would repeal the "fairness doctrine," under which a network can be forced to air opposing opinions, and the "equal access" provision, under which networks must sell network time to political campaigns on an equal basis and without network right of censorship. The "equal access" provision has been a key part of the strategy of political candidates outside of the mainstream, such as Democratic Party presidential contender Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., to break national media blackouts of their campaigns and policies.

The bill argues that "the free and unregulated communications media are essential to our democratic society" and that "there no longer is a scarcity of outlets for electronic communications." Packwood ignored the fact that the three major networks have clear political policies and a government-protected monopoly over the national news.

The chances for passing the legislation are not clear at this point, but it has been the case in the past that Congress has not been eager to completely repeal the equal access doctrine.