

# A look at the 101st Congress

by Ronald Kokinda

The new, 101st Congress, which will be sworn into office in January, is anticipated to reflect some major changes, primarily in the Senate. Whatever criticisms could be made of outgoing Senate Majority Leader Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.), and there are many, the election of George Mitchell (D-Me.) as Majority Leader will likely result in a Senate even more anti-defense, and more rabidly environmentalist than before. It is as if the Senate were restructured to accommodate major new Soviet initiatives to disarm the West, impose a global shutdown of industry under the name of environmentalism, and impose debt restructuring such that no real economic recovery takes place.

But first, the personnel changes.

While Mitchell beat Sens. Daniel Inouye (D-Hi.) and Bennett Johnston (D-La.) to become Majority Leader, the rest of the Senate Democratic leadership is as follows: Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), a world federalist, won reelection as Majority Whip, defeating a challenge from Wendell Ford (D-Ky.); David Pryor (D-Ark.) won election as Secretary of the Democratic Conference, defeating Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.); Alan Dixon (D-Ill.) was elected Chief Deputy Whip; and Senator Inouye was appointed by Mitchell to chair the Steering Committee.

Mitchell, who chairs the Democratic Policy Committee *ex officio*, filled out his own chain of command by creating a co-chairmanship to the Policy Committee to which he appointed the very liberal Sen. Thomas Daschle (D-S.D.). To the legislative review subcommittee of the Policy Committee were added three newly elected senators: Richard Bryan (D-Nev.), Charles Robb (D-Va.), and Herbert Kohl (D-Wisc.).

While Byrd was anti-Soviet and could be considered pro-defense and pro-NATO, Mitchell and coterie have been consistently against both higher defense spending and most of the specific weapons systems controversial enough to come up for specific votes. He is strongly against the Strategic Defense Initiative. While Byrd, from the coal-mining state of West Virginia, was against actions on acid rain which would shut down industry, Mitchell has consistently pushed for quick and radical measures.

A series of initiatives to shut down industry under the fraud of the "Greenhouse Effect," which got off the ground during 1988 with hearings by the Energy and Natural Resources, and Agriculture Committees, will have a great deal of play under Mitchell. A major conference by the Climate Council entitled "Preparing For Climate Change" and calling

for deindustrialization was chaired by Mitchell last year.

A senator who might have advanced somewhat realistic solutions on the debt crisis, John Melcher (D-Mont.), was defeated by Conrad Burns (R). Melcher correctly placed much of the blame for the destruction of Third World nations' economies on the International Monetary Fund.

Among the changes in committee assignments, Byrd will now chair the Appropriations Committee, replacing the retiring John Stennis (D-Miss.); James Sasser (D-Tenn.) will chair the Senate Budget Committee, replacing the retiring Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.); Senator Pryor has assumed the chair of the Committee on Aging, replacing Melcher; and Donald Riegle (D-Mich.) will chair the Banking Committee, replacing the retiring Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wisc.). Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) will take over Proxmire's chairmanship of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies, which includes NASA and the space program. None of these changeovers is expected to represent a major policy shift from its predecessor. Riegle may be even more populist than Proxmire, and may be more willing to take on the major banking interests.

Senators Robert Kerry (D-Neb.), Brock Adams (D-Wash.), and Wyche Fowler (D-Ga.) have been added to the powerful Appropriations Committee, which, by controlling the purse strings always facilitates a senator's reelection chances. Sen. Charles Robb, who won election handily, has been given a post on the Foreign Relations Committee, possibly an indication that he is being groomed for a run at the White House.

The only change on the Republican leadership side was the selection of Sen. Don Nichols (Okla.), who defeated Sen. John McCain (Ariz.), to replace Sen. Rudy Boschwitz (Minn.) to head the Republican Campaign Committee.

On the House side there were similarly very few changes in the leadership or committees. Rep. William Gray (D-Pa.), whose term as chair of the House Budget Committee had expired, was elected chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, the number four leadership position, replacing Rep. Dick Gephardt (D-Mo.) whose term had also expired. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) was elected vice chairman of the Caucus. Rep. Leon Panetta (D-Calif.), a malthusian budget cutter, was chosen chair of the Budget Committee.

Perhaps the only interesting change in the House was the selection of Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) as chairman of the House Banking Committee. Gonzalez has consistently been an outspoken critic of usury and the destruction of the productive U.S. economy.

Rep. Bill Chappell (D-Fla.) was unfortunately beaten in his reelection bid, and the chairmanship of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense is expected to transfer to Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.). While Murtha is considered pro-defense, Chappell's loss means the loss of an important defense advocate.