

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

One-year halt on nuclear testing approved

The House voted 237-167 on June 4 to ban U.S. testing of nuclear weapons for one year, provided that the former Soviet republics continue their unilateral ban on nuclear weapons testing. The measure is part of the military budget package now before Congress.

The White House opposes the measure, and Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, in a letter to the House, argued that testing was necessary in order to keep nuclear weapons functional. Cheney also said that a U.S. moratorium would not deter "rogue nations" from testing weapons of their own. In May, China exploded a 1 megaton bomb, far exceeding the superpower limits on such tests.

A similar proposal for a nuclear testing moratorium in the Senate has 45 cosponsors. Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), a long-time supporter of a nuclear test ban, said that he thought that the Senate would pass the measure.

"The strong support throughout Congress for a pause in nuclear testing," said Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.), "clearly demonstrates that this is an idea whose time has come." Mitchell is working to jockey the legislation through the Senate.

House committee approves tougher sanctions on Cuba

The House Foreign Affairs Committee approved legislation on June 4 which would toughen economic sanctions against Cuba, now suffering severe economic problems with the decline in aid from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The bill, supported by the Bush administration and Cuban-American

groups, would penalize foreign subsidiaries of U.S. corporations which do business with Cuba, although they would be allowed to fulfill existing contracts. The legislation would also allow the President to impose economic sanctions against nations aiding Cuba, and any vessel transporting goods to or from Cuba would be barred from U.S. ports for six months.

Opposition mounts to balanced budget amendment

Opposition to the proposed balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is mounting. Debate was scheduled to begin on the proposal on June 8, but was postponed two days as a lobbying operation by a broad coalition of trade union forces, including the AFL-CIO, was launched in Washington to kill it. The coalition has radio advertisements running in 14 states, and has bombarded Congress with analyses, letters, and telegrams warning of what it sees as the dire consequences of enacting the amendment. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has also decided to lobby against the amendment, fearing that it would result in large tax increases which would primarily hit the business community.

On June 8, Families U.S.A., a national health care advocacy group, issued a study warning that enactment would cause drastic cuts in Social Security and Medicare for 42 million people, forcing 1 million elderly persons into poverty. The campaign complements the efforts of the House and Senate Democratic leadership who are working to stop the amendment.

President Bush gave a press conference, where he supported the amendment on June 4. Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.), the chief author of the amendment, believes that he still has the 290-vote majority needed

for passage. The amendment will still, however, have several obstacles to overcome in the Senate. An alternative amendment, submitted by Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) calls on the President to submit a balanced budget.

Fetal tissue use in research approved in Senate

The Senate on June 4 approved by a vote of 85-12 a bill to lift the ban on the use of fetal tissue in medical research.

The White House, which has threatened to veto the measure, has said that it would support a measure that only allowed research with tissues obtained from miscarriages and tubal pregnancies. Opponents argue that tissue from miscarriages and tubal pregnancies is mostly unusable.

While the Senate vote is more than the two-thirds needed to override a veto, the same measure was passed by the House at the end of May without a veto-proof majority. The right-to-life movement adamantly opposes lifting the ban, seeing it as a step which would further legitimize abortions.

Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), a purportedly pro-life advocate, disagreed. "This is not an abortion issue," said Hatfield. "We must focus on the literally millions of people . . . who could benefit from this research."

Senate moves to restrict China MFN status

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) introduced a resolution which would place restrictions on the issuance of Most Favored Nation (MFN) status for China on June 4—the third anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre—just one day

after the White House announced that it was renewing that status despite China's continued violation of human rights and its violent suppression of dissent.

The legislation stipulates that the President may not recommend the continuation of a new 12-month period of MFN status unless he certifies that China has taken steps toward adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has acted to prevent export to the United States of products produced by prison labor, and has made "overall significant progress" in ceasing religious persecution and in adhering to the guidelines of the Missile Technology Control Regime.

The Senate is likely to pass the legislation, but it is doubtful that it will be able to override an expected White House veto.

Pell calls for military move against Serbs

In statements on the Senate floor on June 4, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) called for tougher actions against the Serbian aggression in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Although the U.N. has imposed sanctions against Serbia, Pell said that they would take too long to take effect. He proposed further action on the part of the United States, including "immediate military actions" to stop the killing. "We should seek a Security Council resolution authorizing the use of air power against Serbia," he said.

Pell also called for a "tightly enforced blockade" against Serbia and Montenegro, utilizing the naval forces of the U.S., NATO, Russia, and Ukraine. The U.S. cannot legally authorize NATO deployment without senatorial advice and consent on the

changes to the alliance's treaty (see page 63). "We should promptly seek a U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing the use of these naval assets to blockade the coast of Montenegro," Pell said. He also recommended that "either under Article 57 or pursuant to a Security Council mandate," the U.S. should consider military action against the artillery now pounding Sarajevo.

CIA predicts slow reform in CIS

John McLaughlin, director of Slavic and Eurasian affairs at the CIA, said that the agency "expected the process of reform to continue moving forward in Russia and elsewhere," but that it would be "contentious" and would "move in fits and starts," in testimony before the Joint Economic Committee.

McLaughlin indicated that reform would be characterized by "recurring crises." "At best," he said, "we are probably looking at a decade-long process." McLaughlin pointed out that even with the cuts in defense spending, "Russia will remain the predominant military power in Eurasia."

Kathleen Horste, an analyst with the Defense Intelligence Agency, testified that although Russia has reduced defense spending by 15%, this was less than the 15-20% drop in production during the last year.

Gore woos minorities to environmentalism

Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), congressional guru of environmentalism, is now trying to bring black and minority groups into singing paeans to his "nature religion." On June 4, in comments on the Senate floor, Gore re-

ferred to a 1987 study done by the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice which argued that in the United States, those who are economically disadvantaged and politically less powerful are much more likely to suffer from the results of environmental degradation than others.

Couching his rhetoric in pseudo-theological terms, Gore said that society must acknowledge its "responsibility to change what we are doing, because what we are doing now degrades the Earth's environment and diminishes our human capacity and human spirit."

In a press conference on June 8, Gore succeeded in mobilizing Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and other black politicians to join his crusade.

Trade bill drops curb on Japanese imports

The Trade Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee on June 9 dropped a controversial provision in the trade bill which would have slapped restrictions on sales of Japanese cars made in U.S. factories as well as those shipped in from Japan. Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.) said a less harsh substitute would be attached to the bill. Rostenkowski felt that the defeated provision would have the "unintended consequence of chilling foreign investment in the United States."

The legislation includes provisions which would require the United States to initiate an investigation, under Super 301, into Japanese practices that hinder imports of U.S. cars and auto parts to Japan. Any evidence of anti-competitive behavior uncovered in such an investigation would be turned over to appropriate government agencies for antitrust action.