

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

### **F**oreign aid budget cut back by Senate

The Senate on Sept. 20, on a vote of 91-9, approved a \$12.3 billion foreign aid budget for the coming fiscal year. The bill continues a steady decline in foreign aid funding over the past decade.

The Senate approved the bill after Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) withdrew an amendment he had offered with Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) that would have eliminated the Agency for International Development, the United States Information Agency, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Faced with a filibuster by Democrats, Helms agreed to withdraw it in order to pass the bill.

The largest share of the funds—more than \$5 billion—will continue to go to Israel and Egypt as part of the Middle East peace accords. The Senate placed stringent conditions, however, on U.S. aid to the nations of the former Soviet Union, and threatened sanctions against Burma unless it observes basic human rights and permits political freedoms.

The level of funding in the bill is \$2.4 billion less than the sum requested by the administration, but \$440 million above the amount approved by the House. The bill continues for one year the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act, which provides aid to the Palestinian Liberation Organization, an item which conservatives who are opposed to the peace process have threatened to eliminate. The bill also allows \$100 million worth of U.S. military equipment stocks to be sent to Jordan.

Lawmakers from both chambers must now work out the differences in conference committee, providing the administration with another opportunity to remove provisions it doesn't support, including one that ties a ban on aid to the former Soviet Union to

its sale of nuclear technology to Iran. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), ranking member on the Armed Services Committee, said the sale was motivated by desperate economic times in the former Soviet Union, not a desire to arm Iran with nuclear weapons. He urged Congress to "make clear we disagree with this sale" and to "make clear it has some penalties attached . . . but not cut off all economic aid."

Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), a senior member of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee, warned, "If we continue down this path, in a very few years, we will have no money to carry out foreign policy other than to fight wars." Secretary of State Warren Christopher, speaking before the New York Council on Foreign Relations on Sept. 20, said that the Senate cuts would force the State Department to close some 50 embassies and consulates, and require widespread furloughs and layoffs.

### **G**ore threatens veto of Interior bill

Vice President Al Gore said President Clinton would veto the \$12 billion appropriations bill for the Department of Interior and related agencies, in comments at the White House on Sept. 22. "If Congress sends the President the fiscal 1996 Interior appropriations bill as approved by the conference committee, he will veto it," Gore said. "This bill takes dead aim on this nation's most cherished natural resources."

The bill, which has been approved by conference committee, would significantly undo many of the environmental restrictions imposed by Congress during the last 10 years. It would lift a moratorium on mining claims on federal lands, speed up logging in

Alaska's Tongass National Forest, and weaken wildlife protections under the Endangered Species Act. It would cut 47% from the President's funding request for energy conservation and efficiency programs, and would impose a one-year moratorium on making additions to the Endangered Species List. It would also cut funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs 18% below the White House request.

Gore claimed the legislation would "benefit special interests at the great expense of taxpayers," and that it "unfairly and inappropriately targets programs for Native Americans." The bill's mining provisions, he said, would give away billions of dollars of federally owned land and mineral deposits with little return to the federal treasury, and other measures would allow logging in some of the nation's most environmentally sensitive areas.

The administration has also indicated that it would veto separate budget reconciliation legislation opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

### **H**ouse would tighten sanctions against Cuba

The House on Sept. 20 approved by a vote of 294-130 a bill meant to sabotage administration attempts to establish a diplomatic rapport with the Cuban government. Secretary of State Warren Christopher has said he will recommend that the President veto the bill if passed in its present form, but the margin of passage was more than the two-thirds majority required to override a veto.

A central feature of the measure would allow Americans to bring damages suits in U.S. courts against firms

“trafficking” in property expropriated from them by the Cuban government. “Traffickers” and their families would also be barred from the United States.

The administration warned that lawsuits by Cuban-Americans would clog U.S. courts. The administration also argued that the measure would be difficult to defend under international law and could increase litigation risks for U.S. companies abroad. The bill also links U.S. aid to Russia to its ties with Cuba, and sets conditions for dealing with whatever transition government may eventually follow that of Fidel Castro.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher told Congress that the “trafficking” provision was already being used by the Cuban government to play on people’s fears that Cuban-Americans would seize their homes and work places if the regime fell. Critics of the legislation warned the bill would give Castro another chance to “play the nationalist card” against Washington, and would further isolate the Cuban people and raise chances of a violent explosion and a new flood of refugees heading for U.S. shores.

In Havana, Cuban Foreign Ministry spokesman Rafael Dausa said the bill would not destroy the island’s socialist system but would hinder possible solutions to the U.S.-Cuba conflict. “I don’t think it’s going to discourage foreign investment nor limit our economic recovery,” he told a news conference.

During debate on the bill on Sept. 21, the House rejected, on a 283-138 vote, an amendment to punch a hole in the trade embargo against Cuba by allowing sale of medical supplies and food staples. The bill, the so-called “Cuba Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act,” would build on the embargo that has been in place through more than three decades of Castro’s rule. It bars foreign aid to countries

that provide assistance to Cuba and, barring a presidential waiver, would reduce aid to Russia and other former Soviet republics by the amount they spend on intelligence facilities in Cuba. The bill would require the United States to oppose Cuban admission into international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, until after a transition in power from the communist rulers.

### **Senate okays one-time arms sale to Pakistan**

The Senate voted 55-45 on Sept. 21 to allow a one-time waiver of a six-year ban on arms shipments to Pakistan. The waiver would permit Pakistan to take delivery of \$368 million worth of U.S. missiles and other military equipment held up by sanctions imposed in 1990 when then-President George Bush declined to certify that Pakistan did not have nuclear weapons.

The vote also paves the way for Pakistan to be reimbursed for, but not to receive, 28 Lockheed F-16A fighter aircraft it bought at the same time, something that President Clinton promised Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto he would try to facilitate when she visited Washington earlier this year. The equipment package includes Harpoon surface-to-surface missiles, three Orion anti-submarine aircraft, Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, radar equipment, and parts for F-16s and Cobra helicopters. The entire package is worth \$1.4 billion.

Opponents of the waiver, citing the potential for the military sales to heighten tensions between Pakistan and India, said they would seek to reverse the vote. They accused Pakistan of misleading Washington about its intentions, because of its purchase

from China of missiles able to deliver nuclear warheads.

### **Farm subsidies backed by House committee**

A bill, the “Freedom to Farm Act,” sponsored by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), was defeated in the Agriculture Committee on Sept. 20, when some Democrats joined with four Republicans to oppose the bill. Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.) warned that the measure would risk “devastating” effects on the farm economy.”

The defeat of the Roberts proposal, which would have made \$13.4 billion in cuts in the farm budget, would leave intact current federal agriculture policy. It was a major defeat for the Conservative Revolution agenda, by farm-state legislators unwilling to make the major cuts mandated by the Contract with America’s “deficit reduction” program. A less draconian Democratic alternative was also rejected.

Roberts is expected to modify the bill to bring on board some of the dissenting Republicans, several of whom are concerned with the fate of subsidies to cotton farmers. “Once my cotton farmers are accommodated with a program they are satisfied with, then I’ve said all along I’d vote for Freedom to Farm,” Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.) told Reuters. If Roberts fails to get a bill through committee, the farm programs will be taken up by the Budget Committee, which will be less keen on taking farmers’ interests into account.

In the Senate, the bill is also in trouble. Although Agriculture Committee Chairman Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) supports the Roberts bill, he is facing tough opposition from Thad Cochran (R-Miss.).