

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda and Susan Kokinda

Senate committee completes Abscam coverup

The special Senate Committee charged with investigating wrong-doing in the FBI undercover operation known as Abscam is expected to file its completed report with the Senate by Dec. 15. As many expected after the Senate capitulated to extreme pressure and moved to expel Sen. Harrison Williams, the report will be a whitewash.

According to Capitol Hill sources, the report will conclude that none of the seven members of Congress who have been convicted and whose cases are currently on appeal were illicitly targeted; that none of them were entrapped by the FBI; and that the sloppiness in the investigation is nothing that cannot be corrected by better management and supervision of such investigations. Specific criticisms expected from the report that the FBI relied excessively on the informants' say-so that certain officials were "prone to take bribes"—which was all the "probable cause" that the FBI had to go on—that convicted con artist Melvin Weinberg was not supervised strongly enough, and that there were gaps in the videotaped, recorded, and written FBI reports on the investigation, are all expected to be gross understatements and amount to a slap on the wrist.

Sources have also discounted any ulterior motive for chief committee counsel James Neal taking up his law practice again in October, long before the committee report was ready, although he remains as a consultant to the committee. The means to ensure that nothing explosive came out during the investigation was firmly in place. "They just got bored," one source said, "Senators and staff just began losing interest when they began

to think they'd find nothing big."

The Senate investigation has contrasted with that of the House Judiciary subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights chaired by Don Edwards (D-Calif.). The House committee has heard from many witnesses including the U.S. attorneys who have stated that the court convictions of the Abscam victims have held so far because no one has all the facts, especially the judges; that a special prosecutor should be impaneled to investigate and prosecute Mel Weinberg; that malfeasance of office and other charges might be applicable to government officials in Abscam; that there was fabrication of relevant facts; that the bounds of proper conduct of prosecution had been overstepped; and that the rights of innocent citizens in Abscam had been savaged with no redress, and no one held accountable.

Increased aid to Israel despite White House pleas

The Senate Appropriations Committee affirmed its Foreign Operations Subcommittee decision to increase military and economic aid to Israel, despite administration requests to hold the level to that requested by the administration. The full committee passed the increased aid request in action taken on Dec. 2.

The earlier action by the subcommittee had been fought by Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.) (chairman of the full committee as well as subcommittee member), who read the subcommittee a note from National Security Adviser William P. Clark who argued that the aid increase would "undermine the peace initiative." The \$125 million increase in economic aid and the \$350 million increase in military aid, Hat-

field argued, "is sending a signal that [the subcommittee] supports the invasion and continued occupation of Lebanon." The original administration request for military and economic aid for Israel, part of the foreign aid package for fiscal 1983, was made before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Despite the Senate appropriations committee action on the entire foreign aid bill, of which the Israeli aid is only a part, it is extremely unlikely that the foreign package will be brought up for passage during the lame-duck session. In that case, aid will be continued under a new stopgap continuing resolution, and the administration effort to keep aid levels to those established in their original request is apparently aimed at influencing that stopgap funding bill.

Times security leaks raised in Senate confirmation

The conservative group of U.S. Senators who have organized themselves informally into a Senate Republican Steering Committee are holding up the nomination of former *New York Times* reporter Richard Burt as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, citing among other causes, his role in writing *Times* articles which were damaging to national security. Burt's nomination came to the Senate floor on Dec. 8, along with the nominations of Robert Grey, Jr. as deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and Richard McCormack as Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs. Grey is also opposed by the conservatives, while McCormack is being blocked by a group of liberal senators in retaliation.

The threatened filibuster against

Grey, lead by Helms, (R-N.C.), Grassley (R-Iowa), Symms (R-Ida.), Jepsen (R-Iowa) and Denton (R-Ala.), according to sources in the White House, may lead to Grey's sacrifice in an effort to salvage the Burt nomination. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) of the Senate Intelligence Committee, speaking also for the absent Chairman of the Intelligence Committee, Barry Goldwater, (R-Ariz.), charged that Burt's 1979 articles about U.S. satellite reconnaissance systems endangered U.S. national security. Orrin Hatch has also questioned Burt about recent *Times* articles on arms control which appeared shortly after Burt, now serving in another capacity in the State Department, met with *Times* reporters. Burt has denied leaking to the *Times*, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has concluded that his earlier revelations as a "reporter" had been taken into account in clearing the nomination for floor action.

House passes nuclear waste bill

The nuclear waste bill, H.R. 5121, which the House passed by voice vote on Dec. 2, is substantially more oriented toward environmentalist preferences than the Senate version passed last April. An effort will be made to work out the differences between two versions and get a compromise bill passed before Congress adjourns, otherwise the bills will die with this Congress. Getting a waste bill through Congress is a prerequisite for a U.S. civilian nuclear energy future. Environmentalists have used the nuclear-waste issue as one of their main weapons to stop nuclear energy development.

Both the House and Senate ver-

sions would establish a process leading to permanent underground disposal of high-level radioactive waste by the mid-1990s.

The differences between the two versions center around burial siting and retrievable storage. According to one House source, environmentalist-oriented members are concerned about Senate efforts to circumvent state vetoes on siting decisions by allowing some of the storage facilities to be operated by private concerns. The Senate, claiming that utilities are running out of room to store spent fuel, is more favorable to an interim federal storage site. On the question of monitored, retrievable storage, the Senate would mandate building long-term facilities that would enable spent fuel to be retrieved for recovery of plutonium by means of reprocessing, a technology also essential to expanding the energy resource base of the nuclear cycle. The House version, however, proposes a five-year study to look at the issue, apparently fearing that it would become an alternative to permanent burial. And, the House has more provisions for preserving the "adequacy" of environmental-impact statements and reviews.

Given the limited span of the lame-duck session and the pressure of other business, it is unclear whether a compromise can be reached.

'Jap-bashing' bill moves to House floor

Characterized as a "going-away present for old Doug" Fraser, President of the United Auto Workers, legislation mandating that cars sold in the U.S. have a high percentage of U.S. parts, was cleared for House floor action by

the Rules Committee on Dec. 7. The bill, introduced by Rep. Richard Ottinger (D-N.Y.) and supported by organized labor, would severely restrict imports of foreign-made cars, which could not cost-effectively meet the requirements of the "domestic content" provisions.

The House Rules Committee—meeting on Pearl Harbor Day—heard opponents of the legislation, with administration support, warn of a new wave of retaliatory protectionism if the measure should become law. At the same time, the full House was adding an unprecedented "Buy America" provision to a highway improvement bill, by leaving out the traditional loopholes which allow foreign goods to be purchased. Ways and Means Committee member Bill Frenzel (R-Minn.), who have been leading the fight against this new wave of protectionism, warned of "the most severe restrictions in the nature of a 'buy America' provision that I have ever seen."

Sam Gibbons, the leading Democrat on the Ways and Means Committee opposing the legislation, warned that passage of the "domestic content" bill would carry with it echoes of the trade wars of the 1930s. He further argued that the protectionist backlash would cost American workers more jobs than it would create.

The AFL-CIO and UAW leadership has backed the legislation as a sop, while it continues its policy of protection for Paul Volcker and his usurious interests rates which have been the single greatest immediate cause of the collapse of the U.S. auto industry.

While the legislation is expected to pass the House, it will probably not pass the Senate this session.