

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda and Susan Kokinda

St Germain attacks handouts to banks

Representative Fernand St Germain (D-R.I.), chairman of the House Banking Committee, attacked the banks for demanding new concessions, because the House had recently passed H.R. 2443 giving bank customers timely access to their deposits. "No sooner had the House acted, than rumors began circulating around the lobbyists' watering holes that the banks—who have lived high off the delayed funds game—planned to exact a new price from the consumer if H.R. 2443 was to become law," St Germain said.

"Sure, we'll let our customers have their money if the Senate lets us dabble in retail businesses, the securities market, insurance, and whatever high-risk investment that happens to come along. . . . We'll let you be protected for a price," St Germain characterized the bankers' line. "It will be interesting to see whether the Senate will protect consumers' basic rights without having to pay a further price," he said.

Congress back to the bottle after court blocks G-R

Congress has tried everything to solve the U.S. budget deficit short of responsibility. It has blamed the President, the Defense Department, and the American people. Then, in a final act of *mea culpa*, it passed the Gramm-Rudman amendment to enforce automatic cuts, crying "save me from myself." Now the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington D.C. has passed the buck back to congress. A three-judge federal panel handed down a decision on Feb. 7 declaring the automatic se-

questration under Gramm-Rudman unconstitutional. An appeal to the Supreme Court will be made by Gramm-Rudman proponents.

By prior agreement, congressmen led by Rep. Mike Synar (D-Okla.) filed the suit challenging Gramm-Rudman, had given the okay to keep the automatic spending cuts of \$11.7 billion in the first round on schedule, pending a Supreme Court decision.

The three-judge not strike down the overall deficit reduction limits mandated by the Gramm-Rudman law. If the automatic sequestration is also held unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the cuts will be put into a congressional resolution for a vote in both the House and Senate. Congress, as now appears likely, will have to vote on these cuts in an election year.

Shuttle program, manned flight pushed

Two bills were introduced into the House on Feb. 3 to increase NASA funding for FY86 by \$400 million to begin immediate construction of a new shuttle orbiter to replace Challenger, destroyed in the tragic Jan. 28 incident. Introduced by Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.), who serves on the space sciences subcommittee of the House Science and Technology Committee, the bills, H.R. 4103 and H.R. 4104, allow the space agency to decide whether to start building the new orbiter from scratch, or to use the spare components NASA has accumulated during the Shuttle program.

NASA estimates that another orbiter could be built in about three years, using spare parts in stock, at a cost of about \$1.8 billion. NASA has been trying for several years to get administration backing for a fifth orbiter. But

if the fourth orbiter is not replaced, and quickly, NASA will fall woefully behind in the Shuttle program schedule.

The overall proposed FY87 NASA budget submitted to Congress was \$7 billion, up \$287 million over FY86, and included a \$410 million increase for the permanent manned orbiting space station, scheduled to start operations in the mid-1990s. In the budget proposal, Reagan wrote, "The space station will facilitate space-based research, help develop advanced technologies potentially useful to the economy, and encourage greater commercial use of space."

Guarded support for new Shuttle construction came from Rep. Edward Boland (D-Mass.), appropriations subcommittee with responsibility over NASA. "I would favor a fourth orbiter. I don't think NASA can meet its requirements for spaceflights without it," Boland said. However, he nodded to "fiscal restraints," saying, "But I'm not sure we can."

What's Going on Dept: Reduce paper-shuffling?

Representative Jim Courter (R-N.J.) introduced two additional bills on Jan. 29 to dismantle what he called the "military Congressional complex," or bureaucracy that has massively expanded the paperwork demands upon the Pentagon and the Congress. One bill would streamline the Congress by merging the Appropriations Committee functions into the House Armed Services Committee and the Budget Committee, which Courter claimed would cut down on the number of committees having Pentagon oversight and on the number of times the

Congress would have to take up the same issue for a vote. The second bill would eliminate the Defense Logistics Agency and the Defense Contract Audit Agency and move their functions to each of the military services.

Courter claimed that this would "achieve the dismantlement of two centralized bureaucracies and the elimination of a large number of high-salary civil-service billets."

Defense reorganization is proceeding

The Senate Armed Services Committee began marking up legislation to restructure the Defense Department this week, conducting its markup behind closed doors. The House has already passed a reorganization bill in this Congress; this is the first time that the Senate is expected to act.

The deal that Weinberger did refuse

"Quite frankly, Senator, there is no one [in the Congress] we can make a deal with that can deliver," Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger told Sen. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.) at Senate Budget Committee hearings Feb. 6. Gorton was among several senators asking Weinberger to get the President to make a "deal" on a package of tax increases and defense cuts in an attempt to avoid the Gramm-Rudman automatic sequestration next Oct. 1.

Weinberger noted that every one of the "deals" that the President made with Congress in the last three years, including the commitment in the congressional budget resolution of last August to a real 3% increase in defense spending for FY87, "have not been kept."

As Weinberger and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) chairman Adm. William Crowe appeared before the Senate Armed Services and Budget Committees the week of Feb. 3, fiscal and budget reality, not the military reality of the threat the United States faces was the predominant theme.

As Weinberger and Crowe elaborated in their testimony, the Soviet buildup is "unprecedented in world history." Weinberger acknowledged that the Soviets' lead over the United States in military capability "could very quickly" widen. For the first time, the JCS military posture statement does not assert that the United States has "rough strategic parity" with the Soviet Union.

Yet as Rep. Robert Dornan (R-Calif.) pointed out in the *Congressional Record* on Feb. 5, very few of the members of Congress bother to attend DIA and CIA classified briefings on the Soviet capabilities. "There are only 60 out of 435 Members of this House . . . who have benefited themselves of [these] top secret briefings on what the Soviets are doing with their SDI Program," Dornan said.

Moscow approves a Ted Kennedy presidency

Does Ted Kennedy believe that Moscow chooses the American president? If so, he is running harder than ever. After scandals seemingly forced him to bow out of the 1988 presidential race, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) is conducting a torrid pace of international travel. On Feb. 5 Kennedy was received in Moscow by Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in what is being described by American press accounts as diplomacy preparatory to the upcoming second Reagan-

Gorbachov summit.

Kennedy went on Soviet television Feb. 7 to assure the Russian people that he believes their leader Gorbachov sincerely wants to negotiate real reductions of nuclear weapons with the United States. "I believe . . . Gorbachov is ready to negotiate a real reduction in nuclear weapons. As he has said, 'There can be no victors in a nuclear war.' I know that President Reagan is ready to enter into such an agreement." On Feb. 6, Gorbachov met with Kennedy, and, according to TASS, told the senator that the next summit "should yield practical results, produce serious shifts in the directions that are of the greatest importance for the cause of peace, otherwise it would have no sense." The two also discussed the SDI, with Gorbachov telling Kennedy, "We propose to rid the world of nuclear arms in the 15 years that the authors of the U.S. 'Star Wars' program set aside for the experiments aimed allegedly at trying out the recipes of nuclear disarmament through space arms."

Kennedy clearly has Moscow's vote for U.S. President. He was greeted with the publication of a best-selling book and play, titled *The Burden of Decision*, by none other than Fyodor Burlatskii, the KGB mouthpiece who said the U.S. SDI program was a *casus belli*. "For the first time on our stage, we are showing the American President with sympathy," he said. "A change came about in both Kennedy's and Khrushchev's consciousness," he said. "They both came to understand that nuclear war is unthinkable." The subject is the Cuban missile crisis, and JFK is martyred for compromising with the Soviets and recognizing Cuba, over warnings from J. Edgar Hoover that such a move will cost him his life. He walks away and there is a loud shot, ending the play.