

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

House begins savage cuts in defense budget

Several House committees have voted cuts in defense funding which foreshadow savage cuts in the Strategic Defense Initiative and other programs. Modest resistance has arisen from the House Armed Services Committee.

The House Appropriations Committee acted on a FY87 supplemental appropriations bill by wiping out the entire \$518 million funding request for the SDI, including a heavy lift rocket. The Senate is waiting for a full House vote before taking action. The Senate usually votes somewhat higher funding levels, but it is now under Democratic control.

The House Budget Committee, which sets an overall spending ceiling, voted on April 1 for a \$288 billion defense budget, smaller than funding for defense last year; it was adopted by the full House on April 9.

The usually more pro-defense Armed Services Committee voted for \$305.7 billion out of \$312 billion requested by the administration in defense authorization, rejecting the advice of its chairman, Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), in an unusual open committee markup. The majority of the committee decided to act on the premise of defense needs rather than budget considerations, but the House is expected to drastically cut this figure to conform with the budget ceiling.

The full committee on April 7 voted 30 to 20 to keep \$250 million of \$591 million requested for a rail mobile MX missile, thereby rejecting Aspin's move in the R&D subcommittee to completely eliminate funding in favor of the Midgetman.

In a small victory for SDI, the full committee voted to fund the SDI at

\$3.84 billion rather than the \$3.3 billion passed by the Aspin subcommittee. The full committee voted also to include \$213 million in funding for the Navy's newest attack submarine, the Seawolf, and \$250 million for the anti-satellite (ASAT) system, both knocked out by the Aspin-led R&D panel, and for \$660 million to start two Nimitz class aircraft carriers.

By a narrow 25 to 24 vote, however, the committee voted to force the administration to adhere to the "narrow" interpretation of the ABM treaty. It also rejected an amendment by Rep. Courter (R-N.J.) to seek early 1990s SDI development.

Congress converges on welfare reform

In a major cost-cutting effort, Congress is converging on agreement with the states and the Reagan administration to reform welfare.

All agree that welfare mothers should get education, job training, child care, and work, which should be expected under economic recovery conditions where such programs as new major public works projects would be creating new and necessary jobs. However, the effort to purge the welfare rolls under current depression conditions means make-work jobs or minimum wages which are below the poverty line at best. At worst, it means channeling millions of people through "New Age," "mediating structures" types of social engineering.

Senators Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and Kennedy (D-Mass.), and Representatives Levin (D-Mich.) and Ford (D-Tenn.), all have a major hand in sponsoring reform legislation.

Levin's bill, H.R. 1696, changes the Social Security Act so that every-

one receiving Aid for Families with Dependent Children or welfare payments would have to register for counseling and job referral. It would be left up to the states whether mothers with children between 3 and 6 years of age would be forced to work more than a 20-hour week in such a program. Ford's bill, H.R. 1720, would require states to provide AFDC benefits for two-parent households if all other conditions were met, which would allow families to stay together.

Ironically, many liberals have joined in defending the premise that Reaganomics is working. Levin's office said that the Joint Economic Committee study showing the majority of new jobs created pay roughly \$7,000 per year, "is being challenged." Whether make-work or socially useless, they believe the jobs are there.

The Ways and Means Committee is currently marking up legislation which may come to the House floor as early as May.

Weicker attacks AIDS research cuts

Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.) blasted President Reagan for cuts in funding for basic AIDS research programs on April 3.

Weicker is part of the "civil rights" faction which rejects standard public health measures against AIDS such as screening and quarantine, and claims that "education is all we can do immediately." However, he has fought for increased medical, scientific, and research funding for a vaccine or a cure.

Weicker said AIDS "may be the greatest threat to life that has ever been posed." While the President gave encouragement in his Philadelphia

speech, "unfortunately, encouragement does not win wars," he said. Referring to World War II, Weicker said that it was "money and manpower not just morale that won the war and the fight against AIDS will be no exception. . . . This threat of disease is as great as any threat that was posed to this nation by the Axis."

Weicker chided the President's claim that the AIDS budget was increased by \$100 million. "But the President is proposing a \$600 million cut in other basic biomedical research by the National Institutes of Health . . . and you have cut the resources committed to AIDS by half a billion dollars," he said.

"We have an epidemic whose cause has been identified, isolated, cloned, and its structure mapped, all in a few short years, thanks to the monies expended on basic research," Weicker said. "The dollars had come through Democratic and Republican administrations alike decades ago for basic biomedical research."

Bailout of Farm Credit System on agenda

The farm credit subcommittees of the House and Senate Agriculture committees are working on a fast track to develop legislation to deal with the crisis in the Farm Credit System. Both hope to have legislation ready for floor action by the end of April at the latest.

An infusion of federal funds, a bailout, is likely to be part of the FCS rescue package which emerges.

Senator Boren (D-Okla.), who chairs the Senate subcommittee, is still "in the process of collection of ideas," according to staff, but will likely include a provision to buy down interest rates, create a secondary market for

FCS loans, and seek to protect borrower stock. On April 8 the Senate passed S.R. 185 expressing the sense of the Senate that borrower flight should be prevented and borrower stock should not be impaired.

But the General Accounting Office, in a report to Congress and in testimony to the House subcommittee chaired by Rep. Ed Jones (D-Tenn.), said that a federal takeover of the system, including creation of a federal oversight board similar to the Chrysler federal loan guarantee program, is necessary to prevent a collapse. GAO warns that even a straight infusion of federal tax dollars, and reorganization of the system won't hold it together. "We do not believe there is enough time to construct a carefully thought-out long-term solution," the GAO report said.

Testifying to the Agriculture subcommittee of Senate Appropriations on April 7, the National Democratic Policy Committee warned against federal bailouts and outlined a series of short-term steps based on Lyndon LaRouche's statement, "Keep the Local Banks Functioning," to protect farm producers. The NDPC urged a moratorium on farm foreclosures and a return to 90% of parity to quickly boost farm income.

Senate rejects cutoff of Mexico, Panama

The Senate rejected a proposed cutoff of foreign assistance to Mexico, Panama, and the Bahamas based on allegations that they were not fully cooperating with the United States in the war on drugs as the President has certified.

The resolutions were symbolic, since the deadline for a funding cutoff had passed, but the Senate first ap-

proved the cutoff of aid to Panama on April 3 by a vote of 58 to 31, before rejecting the resolution on April 8 by a 49-48 vote. The Bahamas cutoff was rejected 54-34 and Mexico 49-38 on April 3.

Senator Helms (R-N.C.), who is attempting to replace Panamanian General Manuel Noriega and make a Nazi collaborator, Arnulfo Arias, President of the country, teamed up with Boston Brahmin Senator Kerry (D-Mass.) who just gained the chairmanship of the drug subcommittee of Foreign Relations, in sponsoring the resolutions.

Senator McCain (R-Ariz.) strongly condemned the resolution on Mexico. "The question that must be asked is whether it will help or hinder efforts to cooperate between ourselves and Mexico in eradicating this terrible disease," McCain said. "I can state that the answer is 'no.'" Senator Bentsen (D-Tex.) condemned the resolution as "bad drug control policy and bad foreign policy," which would undercut ongoing law enforcement cooperation with Mexico. Senator Lugar (R-Ind.) pointed out that Mexico has "already lost 400 drug enforcement officials" in trying to fight the war.

Both Senators Pell (D-R.I.) and Dodd (D-Conn.) spoke against the Panama resolution. Dodd noted that many were voting on the issue of Noriega, a strong nationalist. Pell pointed out that Panama has "adopted new narcotics laws," "virtually eliminated marijuana cultivation," "increased narcotics enforcement personnel by 35%," carries out joint naval patrols with the United States, and that U.S. "requests for search and seizure of Panamanian vessels suspected of carrying narcotics on the high seas are granted routinely, and with no foot-dragging."