

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Senate passes trade war bill

The Senate completed over three weeks of work on the trade bill, passing it by a vote of 71-27 on July 21. A House-Senate conference to resolve differences between the two versions is expected to begin in September. The bill faces the threat of a White House veto.

The Senate bill contains a variant of the highly protectionist Gephardt provision contained in the House bill. The provision mandates import restrictions and retaliation if other nations fail to reduce their trade surplus with the United States. The Senate approach instead attempts to force open markets for U.S. goods.

The Senate grants protection to any American industry injured by imports even when traded fairly.

The Senate had first restricted the President's discretion to deny import restraints sought by domestic industries to cases of national security, or where a company would suffer from increased costs. Two days later on July 9, two amendments were adopted by voice vote, sponsored by Sens. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.) and Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) allowing the President wider latitude to deny relief if the costs affected the poor, or added the impact of possible retaliation against American farmers.

The Senate version also includes a provision sponsored by Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) and Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) requiring companies with 100 or more employees to give 60 days notice of their intention to close a plant. Passed by a vote of 60-40 on July 9, business and the administration are strongly opposed on the grounds that it would place them at a competitive disadvantage. Business is

also leery of the political mobilizations that are made to attempt to get companies to stay in a community.

An attempt was made by Senator Gramm to eliminate the section of the bill which would create a new international debt management agency, but was defeated 50-49 on July 15. Gramm objected that the type of agency and its cost was not clarified by the bill. A provision sponsored by Sens. Don Nickles (R-Okla.) and Steve Symms (R-Idaho) was incorporated to halt all lending to develop products defined as being in surplus. This perhaps was the most clear-cut acceptance of accommodation to current depression conditions.

Annunzio attacks banking deregulation

Rep. Frank Annunzio (D-Ill.), a senior Democrat on the House Banking Committee, on July 15 strongly attacked the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act, which Congress passed in 1980, and which some hope will be followed up with further massive deregulation of the banking system in the near future. For example, Alan Greenspan, the chairman-designate for the Federal Reserve and an ally of the House of Morgan banking interests, testified in favor of further deregulation during his confirmation hearings before the Senate Banking Committee on July 21.

Annunzio outlined how he had fought against deregulation in 1980 and had argued that "the legislation was anti-consumer and would end up costing consumers millions of dollars a year in unnecessary expenses.

"I also predicted that the legislation would be responsible for hundreds

of financial institutions being forced out of business. Perhaps, if the GAO had issued its report in 1980 rather than 1987, consumers and the banking industry would be on much sounder footing."

Annunzio showed a report newly prepared by the General Accounting Office, which has now confirmed that consumers were hurt by deregulation.

Lower-income consumers were more affected, Annunzio said. "The report suggests that for the most part what the banks gave with one hand under deregulation, they took away with the other hand and both legs. Thus, the consumer instead of gaining from banking deregulation, actually lost ground. . . .

"My vote against the legislation in 1980 was the right vote. I am happy to see that others, even seven years later, are starting to realize that financial deregulation was an idea whose time had not come."

GOP task force told: AIDS politically protected

Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) outlined testimony on the House floor July 15, which had been presented to the Congressional Republican Leadership Task Force on June 3, that made hair-raising allegations on how AIDS has been treated as a politically protected disease.

Dannemeyer warned of the extreme economic and demographic consequences of the AIDS epidemic. AIDS is spreading "at a speed that jeopardizes our very survival and threatens our economic stability," he said. "We could lose one-quarter of the world's population before we gain control of this epidemic, even if we

act swiftly right now." He added that society is "in grave danger from the experts who have consistently misread this epidemic."

Dr. Theresa Crenshaw testified before the task force on the various ways AIDS has been politically protected. "The most interesting and unfortunate politics at the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] have been the politics of labeling, the artificial and misleading distinction between AIDS, ARC, and confirmed asymptomatic infection," she said. This has created a "false sense of security" because "cases are discussed in terms of thousands rather than millions." She also noted that the self-consoling definition of "high-risk group" has been continually expanded to encompass virtually the entire population.

Crenshaw also charged that business concerns have played a role in allowing the spread of AIDS. "The big business of blood banking caused delayed screening of blood for almost a year beyond the proven value of testing and continues to claim greater safety of transfusions than is warranted."

She charged that alternatives such as blood substitutes or suctioning and filtering a person's own blood during an operation were not made known to people as options.

Crenshaw noted various interest groups trying to protect themselves. "Africa would hate to have it known that AIDS was spread by mosquitoes," she said. "It would ruin their tourist trade. Gays would not want it known that AIDS is spread by casual contact, for fear that they would be ostracized."

"Laws have been passed, initiated by Art Agnos in California, that have swept the country and ensure the

spread of AIDS. These laws forbid contact tracing, forbid a physician to tell another physician caring for the same patient that that patient is infected, forbid telling a spouse that their husband or wife is infected, and forbid doing a screening test for AIDS without the witting consent of the individual. This is the only blood test in the history of medicine that cannot be performed by law."

This pressure has "prevented physicians from doing the blood test when they feel it is indicated, has prevented health professionals from communicating with each other, and has forbidden physicians to protect the lives of sexual partners of those infected with the virus."

Legislation tailored for presidential ambitions

Fighting for delegates to the 1988 GOP convention, and kissing the feet of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), seem to have been motivating factors behind some legislation introduced into Congress.

Competing for GOP delegates for the presidential nomination in Puerto Rico, Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kansas) on May 12 introduced a bill for Puerto Rican statehood, S. 1182. Not to be outdone, another presidential aspirant enlisted Rep. Robert Lagomarsino (R-Calif.) to introduce H.R. 2849 mandating a yes or no referendum on statehood. Rep. Ron Dellums (D-Cal.) also joined the fray with a bill to grant Puerto Rico independence.

Rep. Jaime Fuster (D), the Puerto Rican delegate to the House of Representatives, strongly attacked such politicking July 15. Acknowledging

that he represented the party in power which favors the commonwealth status, Fuster said that statehood advocates are not more than 30% of the vote. "The great majority of the people of Puerto Rico in 1984 voted substantially in favor of parties and candidates whose platforms expressly pledged to leave political status matters aside, so as to focus only on urgent socio-economic problems. The bill disrupts political discussion in the island by forcing the public to focus on a matter that is not of their urgent interest or concern."

Fuster posed the questions to be answered. "Is Congress ready and eager to grant statehood to an organized community of Spanish-speaking people who would have the right to elect two Senators and seven Members of the House? Is Congress ready to bear the cost of well over \$1 billion in additional federal aid money to the island which statehood for Puerto Rico would represent, according to a recent Government Accounting Office report?

"Is Congress ready to deal with expected and perhaps fierce opposition not only of significant leftist groups in the island and the mainland who favor independence for Puerto Rico, but also of Latin nations that don't support statehood for the island?"

Placating the Israeli lobby, AIPAC, seems to be another pastime of presidential aspirants. Senators Dole and Paul Simon (D-Ill.) cosponsored S. 1203 on May 14 to shut down two information offices of the PLO located in the United States. Dole claimed that such action was necessary to protect the American people against terrorism, yet no one remotely claimed that either of these offices were linked to aiding or abetting any act of terrorism.