

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Senate yahoos provoke crisis with Mexico

A serious attempt to penalize Mexico for purported failings in the war on drugs was nipped in the bud on April 12, when a sharply divided Senate Foreign Relations Committee decided to leave any decision on possible reprisals against Mexico to the full Senate. The Senate, however, voted 63-27 to revoke the good-will certification on war-on-drugs collaboration given Mexico in March by the Reagan administration.

Last month the administration certified that Mexico and the Bahamas were fully cooperating with U.S. efforts to halt drug trafficking. Such a certification is required for any foreign country identified as a producer or transit point for drugs to continue receiving U.S. aid and other benefits.

Sen. Pete Wilson (R-Calif.) objected to the certification, claiming that the continued large amounts of cocaine and marijuana flowing into the United States, as well as signs of official corruption, should deprive Mexico of such a status. Wilson proposed a resolution to decertify Mexico, which would subject the country to sanctions on aid, lending, and trade.

After lengthy debate in the Foreign Relations Committee over the effect of this move on U.S.-Mexican relations led to an 8-8 tie in the voting, the committee decided to let the question be taken up by the entire Senate without Committee recommendation. After a 3½-hour discussion on the evening of April 14, the Senate voted 63-27 for decertification—a move which would penalize the Mexicans economically.

The measure has been applauded by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who has been waging his own campaign to

overthrow the government of Panama. Kerry said that the move to reverse the certification “reflects the changing mood and dynamic in Congress.”

The move will have serious repercussions on U.S. relations with our neighbors to the south. The knee-jerk reactions of the administration on the Panama issue have already created considerable tension with the nations of Ibero-America, who don't like the idea of major U.S. military operations in Central America. “A slap in the face” of Mexico, as Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) characterized the reversal, could create a “Yankee, go home!” reaction south of the Rio Grande, in which future cooperation on any issue would be made extremely difficult.

The President has said that he will veto any decertification move on the part of the Senate.

Reserves called insufficient for war

In testimony given on April 13, the Senate Armed Services readiness subcommittee was informed that the nation's military reserves were not ready to support front-line forces in the case of an attack on Western Europe.

With the post-Vietnam development of the all-volunteer army, active-duty military forces have been allowed to become smaller on the presupposition that the reserve forces—the U.S. Army Reserve and the National Guard—would be able to fill the gap. Now it appears that the reserves necessary for the defense of Western Europe would not be sufficient to hold off an envisioned Soviet attack.

War plans call for 90,000 reservists with specialized skills to back up front-line forces. Neither these specialists nor the \$9 billion in equipment needed to sustain U.S. forces after the first few days of hostilities seem to be available. This includes reservists skilled in intelligence, communications, and chemical warfare.

In the wake of the INF treaty euphoria, skeptical senators were being told that the removal of intermediate-range nuclear weapons would be accompanied by a conventional build-up. The report to the subcommittee on this issue may serve to get some senators to think twice before they give their okay to a treaty which makes Western Europe indefensible.

Elephantine trade bill still hung up

The controversial thousand-page trade bill is having a difficult time working its way through congressional hearings, although the notorious Gephardt Amendment, which would have effectively been a declaration of trade war against some of our most important trading partners, was eliminated. The issue of the sanctions against Japan's Toshiba Corp. also remains a major concern. President Reagan had threatened to veto the treaty if these provisions were included in the trade bill.

Another point of contention between the Congress and the White House is the plant-closing provision of the bill. This provision states that large companies would be required to give most workers 60 days' notice before closing a plant or instituting massive layoffs. The President has said that he would veto the bill if this pro-

vision remains.

Since the issue has become a point of contention between business and labor, congressional Democrats concerned about the labor vote in the upcoming elections, have decided to take a stand on the issue. House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Texas) and Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) announced their determination to override a veto after seeing April 14's trade figures. They feel that the disastrous trade deficit will give them the opportunity to gather the two-thirds majority in both houses needed for an override.

Some Capitol Hill head-counters doubt, however, that they will be able to gather the necessary votes. If not, the trade bill could become a major cause of industrial unrest in an increasingly chaotic economic situation, characterized by the general absence of any government policy.

'Futuristic weapons' ban could delay INF

Earlier moves by Armed Services Committee chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) to get clarification on whether the INF treaty also bans lasers, particle beams, and microwave weapons of an intermediate range has served to create chaos and conflict in ratification of the controversial INF treaty.

Senate Democrats are trying to use the INF discussion to obtain significant concessions from the President in overlapping areas, e.g., SDI, ABM treaty, etc. Some Senate Republicans like Dan Quayle (R-Ind.), have become concerned that the rush to judgment on the INF will seriously impair SDI research. Quayle is also demand-

ing a clarification on the issue to ensure that such weapons are not included in the agreement on intermediate-range nuclear forces. Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd has insisted that the question of futuristic weapons be settled before the Senate acts on the treaty.

Earlier, two former Reagan administration officials, former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Kenneth Adelman, former director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, said in letters to Senator Quayle that they did not believe that the issue was either addressed or resolved in the U.S.-Soviet negotiations over the INF.

Senate Vietnam vets seek better Viet relations

Sen. Larry Pressler (R-S.D.) has voiced his support for a proposal made earlier by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) for setting up a permanent interest section in Vietnam as a bridge-building move to a country with which the United States shares a good deal of history. Senator McCain was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam for years, and Senator Pressler served 18 months in Vietnam doing research on agricultural development.

Over 3 million Americans served in Vietnam and over 50,000 died in what became the longest war the United States has ever fought. This country continues to bear the scars of that war in a variety of forms, as does Vietnam. Senator Pressler stressed that "whether we like it or not, the United States will always have a common bond with Vietnam for the next 30 or 40 years, I am sure."

The senator stressed that establishing such a permanent interest section would help in promoting the emigration of Amerasians to the United States, in resolving the MIA question, and in establishing a position where the United States could influence a Vietnamese pull-out from Cambodia. Senator Pressler stressed in his remarks the disastrous economic situation the Vietnamese find themselves in 10 years after the end of hostilities, indicating the possibility of a positive U.S. contribution in this respect. He said that he seriously doubts that there are any living prisoners of war still being held in Vietnam.

Byrd will give up post after 1989

Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) announced that he will step down next year after more than a decade as leader of the Democrats. He will, however, run for re-election to the Senate this year with an eye on become the chairman of the powerful Appropriations Committee, a post vacated by the retirement of Mississippi Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.)

Byrd's decision not to run has set off a hot competition for the majority leader post, which includes Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Ha.), Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-La.), and Sen. George Mitchell (D-Mass.). All three have announced an interest in the seat and will be doing their best to profile themselves in the coming months' Senate debate. The need for developing a sharp political profile capable of getting themselves elected to the post may also create an unforeseen dimension in the major Senate debates ahead—including the debate on the INF treaty.