

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Gonzalez wants Wright for vice president

In a press conference held one week before Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis named Sen. Lloyd Bentsen as his running mate, Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Texas) proposed House Speaker Jim Wright as a better alternative in forming a Boston-Austin axis, the winning Democratic combination of the 1960 JFK-LBJ campaign.

"The accusations raised against Jim Wright earlier were politically motivated, because the Republicans know that Wright would be a winner on a Democratic ticket," said Gonzalez. "It has been a very languishing, lackluster campaign so far. We have got to arouse the voters. Jim Wright could do that, and as a legislator he is magnificent."

When questioned as to why Lloyd Bentsen wouldn't be appropriate for consolidating such a Boston-Austin axis, Gonzalez responded, "Many of us in Texas feel that Lloyd Bentsen is not as strongly identified as a Democrat as Jim Wright." Gonzalez commented that Bentsen's voting record has been even more supportive of Ronald Reagan's policies than Sen. Phil Gramm, the Republican from Texas.

### House votes to close military bases

Final House passage on a bill which could lead to the closing of about 20 domestic military bases by the beginning of next year, came by voice vote on July 12. The key vote to accept tough language that would keep congressional participation in base-closing to a minimum had been passed earlier 223-186.

Similar legislation was adopted by the Senate earlier this year, and negotiators from the two houses will now have to work out the differences in the two proposals.

One of the built-in safeguards that had earlier assured that the professional Pentagon-bashers would not simply shut down domestic military bases right and left in an attempt to save money was the procedure by which the local congressional representatives would fight to maintain important military and naval bases in their districts, which were, of course, economically beneficial to the local communities.

This present legislative measure submitted by Rep. Dick Armev (R-Texas) would strictly limit the role of the Congress in the base-closing process. The legislation requires that a special Pentagon commission submit to the secretary of defense a list of proposed base closings by Dec. 31. The secretary will then have 15 days to decide to close all or none of the bases, an approach which is intended to remove political bargaining by both the administration and Congress. Congress could vote to disapprove, although the President, in turn, could veto the disapproval, thereby requiring Congress to mobilize a two-thirds majority in both houses in order to override the veto.

Armev's original proposal would have eliminated the role of Congress entirely in the process, but this met with stiff House opposition and had to be changed to give it a chance of passing.

### Proxmire pushes Rohatyn's fascist budget gouging

Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) has made the first public bid to foist the

austerity program of the bipartisan National Economic Commission on unsuspecting legislators. In floor comments on June 28, Proxmire had read into the *Congressional Record* an article by Felix Rohatyn on the financial crisis.

Rohatyn is a notorious New York investment banker and prominent member of the bipartisan National Economic Commission, the chief behind-the-scenes organization which has been delegated the task of preparing an overall plan of massive austerity and budget cutting for the "first 100 days" of the next administration.

Proxmire and Rohatyn, in contrast to some of our academic economic pundits, are aware that we are heading for a second crash of the markets. Thus, Rohatyn: "We should be ready to take action after the next shock to the system. Such a shock could well be more far-reaching than the last one as a result of the delay and a possibly less benign economic climate." He calls for "strong action by the administration, Congress, and the regulators."

The National Economic Commission, although trying to maintain a low profile until the elections are over because of the politically explosive nature of the measures they are recommending, will come out with all barrels blasting immediately after the elections—with hearings, press conferences, and perhaps even paid advertising for their murderous austerity proposals. Rohatyn is even being mooted as Treasury secretary in a Dukakis administration.

Proxmire is giving him the red carpet treatment, commending him as a "wise and highly respected observer of the American economy." Proxmire has no illusions. He admits that his solution to the economic crisis calls for "pain and lots of it." And if there's anyone who knows how to dish out

pain, it's Felix Rohatyn—the butcher of New York City.

## **D**akota senator warns of locusts and grasshoppers

In floor statements at the end of June, after visiting the drought area in South Dakota, Republican Sen. Larry Pressler warned that grasshoppers and locusts would follow in the wake of the drought. "If the drought continues," said Pressler, "we could have a real problem with grasshoppers and locusts; counties and states may have to expand programs to assist farmers and ranchers control grasshoppers."

Pressler reminded his fellow legislators that this was not the first time that they had had to deal with such problems. The Mormons during the last century were hit by a plague of grasshoppers and were saved by seagulls who came and ate the grasshoppers. Today, in Salt Lake City, there is a huge statue of a seagull commemorating the event.

"In the Old Testament," continued Pressler, "the Pharaoh had no defense against the grasshoppers and locusts. Locusts are mentioned throughout the Bible. Indeed, in Nahum 3:17: 'Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which came in the hedges in the cold day, but when the Sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are.' This is exactly the case in parts of South Dakota.

"Grasshoppers normally feed on grass in conservation reserve acres, rangeland, or other areas," Pressler explained. "With the drought, they are forced to move into nearby small grain or corn fields. . . . It will be a bigger problem next year if we do not take preventative action this year."

Pressler emphasized that the cost of spraying would also have to be tak-

en into account in any type of drought relief package worked out by the Congress and the Agriculture Department.

## **P**lant-closing and trade bills passed

Both the House and the Senate overwhelmingly approved legislation that would require employers to give workers advance notice of layoffs and plant closings, in an attempt to salvage the trade bill vetoed by President Reagan this year. The measure passed the Senate by a 72-23 vote and the House by 286-136.

The bill requires companies with more than 100 workers to give 60 days' written notice of closing an operation involving at least one-third of a plant's workforce or a layoff of 50 or more workers.

Since the bill passed both houses with a more than two-thirds majority—enough to override a presidential veto—it is assumed that President Reagan could be persuaded to sign the bill into law or let it become law without his signature. If President Reagan rejects the legislation and Congress fails to override the veto, Democrats believe that it would make a very popular election issue. Nineteen Republicans, including 7 of the 12 who are seeking reelection this fall, voted for the bill.

The revised trade bill then passed the House 376-45. Congressional Democrats have been pushing the legislation, although, now that the main presidential obstacles have been removed, 133 Republicans voted for the measure. The measure still has to pass the Senate, although as Senate Democrats view this particular piece of legislation as a feather in the cap of Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, chairman of the Finance Committee and Democratic vice presidential hopeful, they would

be eager to get it passed as quickly as possible.

The trade bill, a real bone of contention for the Japanese and other U.S. trading partners, would launch trade war against U.S. allies.

## **C**all for long-range national water policy

Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.) called for a "far more comprehensive national water policy if we are to assure adequate water supplies for the future." More far-reaching than the appeal of the Mississippi River state senators who have recently called on President Reagan to release water from Lake Michigan into the Mississippi River system in order to raise water levels, Senator Hatfield refers to the numerous water projects and irrigation systems set up by the Bureau of Reclamation—projects which were a dim reflection of the more ambitious NA-WAPA water project proposed some 20 years ago by former Sen. Frank Moss from Utah.

Many of these water projects were opposed by the environmentalist movement. Hatfield pointed out how they actually enhanced the habitat for fish and wildlife. "My colleagues will recall," said Hatfield, "the bitter opposition to the Garrison and Oahe projects in North and South Dakota. Projects which, if they had been built, would be in the heart of the 1988 drought. I cannot help but wonder what benefits there would be for farmers and for wildlife had the projects been built. . . . The current drought may serve to focus attention, but when the drought is over, we must not lose sight of the simple fact that there will be more droughts, more shortages, more conflicts over the use of this most precious resource. Our nation needs a long-range national water policy."