

## **Congressional Closeup** by William Jones

### **Senate approves death penalty for terrorists**

On Oct. 26 the Senate, in an overwhelming 79-20 vote approved a measure that would allow federal courts to impose the death penalty against individuals who murder Americans during terrorist activities abroad.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), was considered separately from an omnibus bill which aimed to reinstate the death penalty for more than 20 federal crimes. An alternative proposal, presented by Sens. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.) and Carl Levin (D-Mich.) was voted down 70-29. The Hatfield-Levin bill would have set a maximum penalty of life imprisonment without parole for terrorists who commit murder. Levin argued that a death penalty would make it more difficult to get countries like Colombia to extradite drug traffickers to face charges in American courts.

### **Euthanasia lobby launches offensive**

The congressional euthanasia lobby started flexing its muscle in the U.S. Senate, when John Danforth (R-Mo.) and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) introduced a bill to ensure a patient's "right to die."

The bill, entitled the Patient Self-Determination Act, would give the patient the "right to refuse treatment," and would require providers of health care under Medicare and Medicaid to create procedures "to inform patients of their right to make decisions about care" and "to take other steps to ensure that patient decisions are carried into effect."

Among the "rights" is the right to have a living will, or to delegate a

durable power of attorney to persons who could then decide whether treatment were to be continued or terminated, were the patient unable to decide himself. Care providers under federal programs would also be required to "inquire whether a patient has such a document or person designated" to make such decisions.

In a press release, Senator Danforth lamented the fact "that modern medicine is capable of prolonging the process of death for interminable periods of time," calling that capability "playing God by medicine." Danforth and Moynihan have sent out a circular to gather support for the measure, which they say is the first stage in a strategy designed to "reevaluate health care practice and policy from an ethical, human and caring perspective."

Danforth was the primary opponent of an amendment, submitted last year by Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.), which attempted to stop another form of euthanasia—patient starvation. Danforth has also opposed the catastrophic care bill, since, he reasoned, the government was paying for acute care the elderly shouldn't be getting. The Danforth-Moynihan bill is also supported by Sen. John Heinz (R-Pa.)

### **Budget impasse threatens automatic cuts**

The Democratic-controlled Congress and the Bush administration are still wrangling over a budget agreement which meets the Gramm-Rudman deficit-reduction targets and thus halts implementation of the Gramm-Rudman sequestration (automatic budget cuts), which went into effect on Oct. 16, as the administration dropped its insistence on pushing through its capi-

tal gains tax proposal.

As a result of the failure to reach an agreement, the federal government's temporary \$2.87 trillion debt limit expired at midnight on Nov. 1. Subsequently the Treasury suspended sales of U.S. Savings Bonds, pending legislation to raise the federal debt limit. In order to avoid default by the government, the lawmakers must pass legislation raising the limit to \$3.12 trillion by Nov. 8.

Bush has said that he is willing to let the \$16 billion cuts imposed by the sequestration stand. At a press conference on Oct. 31, he tried to shift the blame for the impasse onto the Congress. "I think the American people see that it is this Congress that is frustrating getting the deficit down," said Bush. "And so they ought to move and move promptly." "The President has gone the extra mile to extend the hand of bipartisanship," chimed in Vice President Quayle in an address to the American Stock Exchange that same week, "and now is the time for the Congress to respond."

Most government departments have not yet been able to say just what impact the cuts will have, but every program will be reduced except Social Security and certain programs for the poor, and will hit almost every American. Bush's confrontation with Congress could accelerate the rapid plunge of the U.S. economy into the throes of a deflationary collapse.

### **Congress to sanction missile exporters**

The Bush administration expressed opposition on Oct. 31 to legislation to impose sanctions against companies contributing to the proliferation of ballistic missiles. Richard Clark, Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-

Military Affairs, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the adoption of such legislation would hamper the administration's efforts to stop the spread of missile proliferation through diplomatic means.

Clark's testimony, however, did not seem to faze committee members. "Congress must act to make illegal traffic in these technologies very hazardous to the pocketbooks of certain kinds of corporations and their subsidiaries," commented Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), one of the authors of the legislation.

Recently the Pentagon acknowledged that it was attempting to stop France from selling rocket technology to Brazil and India, and was concerned about Israel's continuing cooperation with South Africa's missile program.

## **E**nvironmentalists seek action on global warming

The environmental lobby in Congress is demanding the Bush administration do more to halt the alleged "global warming" trend, by imposing controls on industry to prevent carbon dioxide emissions.

Industrial reaction to the Bush Clean Air Bill, which could put a good number of industries out of business because of the added costs, is to fight hard to prevent any drastic action. Sen. Timothy Wirth (D-Colo.) accused the administration of "dragging its feet" on Oct. 24. "We're getting the wool pulled over our heads by a group that has its head in the sand," he said.

But even environmentalist Republicans like Sen. John Chafee (R-I.) are urging Bush to "put the United States in a position of world leadership" at the upcoming international environmental conference in the Netherlands

in November. Saner voices are trying to expose the hoax, although their voices are still unheeded. Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) said on Oct. 25 that "there appears to be a growing urgency to do something, even though it is becoming clear that this something may be in response to a phantom problem." "Before we rush forward with this urge to legislate," cautioned Wallop, "we should have the issue in clear focus."

## **C**ongress agrees on minimum-wage bill

Congressional Democrats and the administration agreed on a compromise minimum-wage bill on Oct. 31, providing for the first increase since 1980.

In June, Bush had vetoed an increase saying he wouldn't accept any minimum-wage rise that went beyond limits he had earlier set as acceptable. The compromise was a softer version of what the White House had said it would accept. Under the agreement with the House and Senate leaders, the minimum wage will rise from the current \$3.35 an hour to \$4.25 an hour by April 1991. Employers could also pay a sub-minimum "training wage" for 90 days to new workers who are up to 19 years old, and then for another 90 days if the company institutes a specific training program for the newcomers.

## **U**krainians could face denial of refugee status

In an amendment introduced on Sept. 20, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) proposed establishing new categories for those who qualify for refugee status. While "Soviet nationals who are Jews or Evangelical Christians" fall

into that category, Ukrainian Catholics and Ukrainian Orthodox believers do not, unless so designated by the Attorney General.

Lautenberg had introduced a similar amendment in June which had included Ukrainians in the refugee category. According to sources in the Ukrainian-American community, Lautenberg had been encouraged to change the bill under pressure from the Anti-Defamation League. As the U.S. becomes more restrictive in its immigration policy, the ADL is concerned that the restrictions fall more heavily on groups other than Soviet Jews.

Lautenberg claims that the Ukrainian Catholics can no longer be considered a refugee group since Gorbachov is in the process of legalizing the Ukrainian Uniate (Catholic) Church. This issue is expected to come up when Gorbachov visits Pope John Paul II in November. But it is not certain that Gorbachov will make such a move.

## **C**onference committee guts SDI program

The defense conference committee approved a \$305.5 billion defense bill Nov. 2 which included a \$3.8 billion for the Strategic Defense Initiative, \$800 million short of the \$4.6 billion Bush administration request, and \$1.8 billion less than the Reagan administration had requested for FY1990.

Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) caustically remarked that the reason for the cuts was that the mission of the SDI program under the Bush administration remained "undefined." "They've changed the program so many times and the architecture has never been really a fixed architecture," said Nunn.