

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Clean Air Act revision passes House

The House passed by an overwhelming 401-25 vote on Oct. 26 a major expansion of the earlier Clean Air Act of 1970. The Senate approved the bill on Oct. 27 in an 89-10 vote.

The 748-page bill incorporates measures that will have a major impact on U.S. industry and could cost \$25 billion a year to implement, according to lowest estimates, resulting in higher prices for new cars, gasoline, electricity, dry cleaning, and a host of products containing newly regulated chemicals.

The bill imposes tighter standards for automobile emissions to curb smog, to be tightened by 1996 to 0.25 grams per mile (gpm) for hydrocarbons and 0.4 gpm for nitrogen oxides. These norms will be tightened after that by 50% if the Environmental Protection Agency deems it necessary.

Industrial emitters of 189 "airborne toxics" will be required to install "maximum achievable control technology" by the year 2003. An overall cap will be imposed on utility emissions of sulfur dioxide of 8.9 million tons a year by the year 2000. It also requires the 111 utility plants in the economically hard-hit Midwest and Appalachia to account for the biggest cuts in the first five years. The bill will also halt the production of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons, a chemical used in fire extinguishers, by the year 2000.

One opponent, Sen. Steve Symms (R-Id.), said the bill would only "deepen the depression."

Immigration bill aims to limit unskilled

Congress passed on Oct. 27 a major revision of legal immigration laws, expanding the number of persons to

enter the United States by nearly 40% and changing the mix of their skills and ethnic backgrounds.

The bill leaves the issue of the immigration of HIV-infected to the discretion of the administration.

Hispanic lawmakers in the House succeeded in killing a provision which would have created a national identity card, which they said would lead to regular on-the-spot police checks of Hispanic immigrants.

The number of immigrant visas issued, now about 500,000 annually, will be raised to 700,000 through 1994 and then drop to 675,000. The law will also more than double—from 54,000 to 140,000 annually—the number of visas granted to persons on the basis of occupational skills.

The number of visas for persons from "traditional source" countries such as Italy, Poland, and Ireland will increase to 40,000 annually. Recently, the majority of immigrants to the U.S. have been from Ibero-American and Asian countries.

The legislation does reduce the waiting period for the relatives of permanent residents from Mexico and other countries with a "high demand" for U.S. visas.

Curbs kept on offshore oil exploration

On Oct. 28, negotiators agreed to keep vast tracts of coastal waters off limits to oil and gas drilling, in spite of the danger of a reduced flow of oil from the Mideast.

In June, President Bush had restricted exploration in areas of the West Coast, the Florida Keys, and New England's Georgia Banks. Earlier this year, Congress had put restrictions on drilling off the coast of North Carolina. The new restrictions are more extensive, affecting 135 million

acres of the continental shelf and significantly expanding the areas restricted earlier by the White House.

Members oppose war action in Persian Gulf

A statement signed by 81 congressmen, issued as the Congress was adjourning and at the highest point of U.S. war preparations, expressed the signators' "grave concern about the possibility of war in the Middle East." The statement warns that "the United States has shifted from a defensive to an offensive posture and that war may be imminent."

"We believe that the consequences would be catastrophic," the signers said, "resulting in the massive loss of lives, including 10,000 to 50,000 Americans. This would not be a 'low intensity conflict.' This could only be described as war."

The congressmen say that they are opposed to any military action and that the embargo should be given every opportunity to work. If the President concludes that all peaceful means of resolving the conflict are exhausted and that military action is warranted, he must seek a declaration of war from Congress.

The signators emphasize that there has been a mechanism set up for a few Members to monitor the situation during the adjournment, but that this body cannot act for the entire Congress. "We demand that the administration not undertake any offensive military action without the full deliberation and declaration required by the Constitution."

GOP seats threatened in upcoming elections

The policy debacles of the Bush ad-

ministration have caused serious problems for Republican candidates in the upcoming elections.

Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) is hitting the campaign trail in a last-ditch attempt to regain control of a race that has become dominated by his black political opponent, Harvey Gantt. The *Washington Post* reported on Oct. 30 that, at a recent campaign rally, Helms was accosted by a protester who wanted to know why he had voted for the savings and loan cleanup legislation. The normally staid Helms ended up pushing the questioner away from the microphone.

The budget issue has also caused serious problems for GOP candidates. "Until two weeks ago," commented Democratic pollster Geoffrey Garin, "there wasn't a partisan cut to this election. That changed once Bush let the Democrats turn the budget issue into a fairness question." At that point, Garin said, "Bush confirmed everybody's fear about the GOP being the party of the rich."

Ed Rollins, whose resignation had been demanded by Bush when he advised Republican candidates to distance themselves from the administration's budget compromise, expressed himself in the following terms: "It took us 12 years to dispel that country club image, only to have it wrapped around our necks in the most crucial election—because of reapportionment—of the decade."

"The environment has turned decidedly against us," said Republican pollster Linda DiVall, "and I'm starting to get the feeling that we might be looking at 1982 all over again," referring to the last mid-term election where the Republicans suffered heavy losses.

Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) said that "the budget debate has reinforced a voter apathy and anger." The anger is focused at anything that represents what is considered the Washington es-

tablishment, and would play to the benefit of anyone seen as being an "outsider."

Nuclear utilities hit by tax hikes

The Senate Energy Committee voted to impose a tax of one-fiftieth of a cent per kilowatt hour on all electric utilities that have operating nuclear energy plants. The money is to go into a fund for decontamination and decommissioning at federal uranium enrichment facilities.

The provision is part of the latest version of the Uranium Enrichment Enterprise restructuring bill. The bill has been passed by the Senate twice, but has been sitting in the House for five years. The Senate committee is now trying to make the bill acceptable to the House. In the new budget proposals, both the House and Senate plan to increase Nuclear Regulatory Commission user fees to cover 100% of the NRC budget in fiscal year 1991, according to *Nuclear Energy Overview* of Oct. 22.

NEA quietly drops non-obscenity pledge

The National Endowment for the Arts has quietly dropped a requirement that grant recipients sign a non-obscenity pledge, now that Congress has voted to scrap content restrictions on federally funded art.

Although the Endowment made no formal announcement of the action, agency officials confirm that the pledge had been withdrawn and would not be required as a condition of receiving grants for the 1991 fiscal year. Shortly before it adjourned, Congress junked the obscenity ban it imposed on the arts endowment a year ago and

voted instead to leave judgments of obscenity to the courts.

The bill omits any explicit obscenity restrictions, saying only that obscenity lacks artistic merit, is not protected speech under the Constitution, and "shall not be funded" by the endowment.

House-Senate conferees trim crime bill

The House-Senate conference committee which is working on the omnibus crime bill has apparently dumped the most draconian provisions demanded by the administration from the bill.

The limits on filing *habeas corpus* provisions have been dropped, the expanded list of crimes carrying capital punishment has been trimmed, and the administration's demands for an expansion of the right to use illegally seized evidence in trials has also been denied.

Probe of CIA's role in savings institutions

The House Intelligence Committee held closed hearings on Oct. 25, to take testimony from CIA director William Webster on allegations that the CIA, in league with various mobsters, siphoned money from a number of savings and loan institutions to fund covert operations, ultimately driving the thrifts into bankruptcy.

Whether the hearing will produce anything of substance is questionable, since the committee staffer heading the investigation just left his job at the CIA in January. But the charges are certainly drawing media attention. CNN'S "Larry King Show," for example, interviewed a former Maryland S&L official who had blown the whistle on CIA operations at his bank.