

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Republicans at odds with Pentagon on base closings

The closing of 31 major military installations, 12 minor ones, and the scaling back of 28 others by 1997 recommended by Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney in an announcement on April 14, has created concern even among many of the Bushmen in Congress. The Cheney recommendations will be reviewed by an independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission and, if approved by Congress, the closings are minimally projected to lead to the loss or movement of 40,000 civilian and 114,000 military jobs.

Sen. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) vowed "to maintain Florida's fair share of defense jobs." Florida is scheduled to lose the Naval Training Center in Orlando—a loss of 17,000 military and civilian jobs.

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) is worried about the political ramifications of the loss of the Philadelphia Naval Yard and the Philadelphia Naval Station, with a potential loss of 13,000 military and civilian jobs. "It looks like the Department of Defense is declaring war on Pennsylvania," commented Specter at a news conference on April 12. With the death of Sen. John Heinz (R-Pa.) in an airplane accident, Specter is also worried that the closure of the shipyard could lead to a Democrat's winning that seat next year.

Sen. Richard Lugar (D-Ind.), with the Grissom Air Force Base in his state scheduled to close, sent a letter to the base closure commission asking it to check for possible errors in the evaluation.

Prospects for electoral gains that Republicans hoped to make by their support of Bush's Gulf war are rapidly dwindling because of the base closures.

The base closures will also be a partisan issue, since 60% of the large bases recommended for closing are in Democratic districts.

### Bush suffers first defeat on judicial appointment

The Senate Judiciary Committee, for the first time out of 77 nominations, rejected a judicial nomination of President Bush when it voted down on April 11 appeals court nominee Kenneth L. Ryskamp of Miami.

Ryskamp was accused of being insensitive on civil rights issues. When he was faced as a federal court judge in Florida with four black youths charged with robbery who were suing the city of West Palm Beach for damages after having been injured by police dogs, Ryskamp commented: "I think of countries where if you are guilty of a robbery, they cut off your hand as a vivid reminder that this is forbidden. It might not be inappropriate to carry around a few scars to remind you of your wrongdoing."

Ryskamp, who is noted for making racial slurs, made no attempt during committee hearings on his nomination to convince the committee that he was not prejudiced, and did not renounce his comments in favor of physical mutilation. Ryskamp was also a member of a country club which, according to Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), was "notorious" for discriminatory practices.

Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.) spoke out against the Ryskamp nomination, which was considered the last blow to the nominee. Although Graham is not a member of the Judiciary Committee, his position was considered important, coming from a Florida senator. Graham had been lobbied by many minori-

ty constituent groups opposed to the Ryskamp nomination including over 50 local and national groups representing Jews, blacks, Hispanics, women, senior citizens, and unions, which organized a grass-roots effort that ultimately resulted in the committee's 8-6 rejection of the Ryskamp nomination.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said the Bush administration was "clearly disappointed" by the defeat.

It was also a personal defeat for Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, who was in charge of the lobbying effort. Thornburgh had called Senators Graham, Howell Heflin (D-Ala.), and committee chairman Joseph Biden (D-Del.) on Ryskamp's behalf.

### House Democrats attack Bush Medicare cuts

The House Budget Committee rejected the President's proposed Medicare cuts of \$25.2 billion over five years, in a study released on April 16.

The Budget Committee's fact sheet on the Medicare reductions noted that the cuts would especially hit the elderly who are using 18% of their income to pay their health care costs than they did before the Reagan administration—compared to 13% in 1980—and, in fact, are paying more of their income for medical costs than they did before Medicare was enacted in 1966!

In addition, over half of the hospitals were losing money serving Medicare patients by the fifth year of the prospective payment system (PPS), which was enacted during the Reagan administration in 1983. Since then, 600 hospitals have closed, and another 918 hospitals are financially distressed and threatened with closure.

The study also notes that if further reductions are added with the President's proposal, the number of physicians agreeing to accept the Medicare-approved charge as payment in full will begin to decline. "In 1988," the study points out, "out-of-pocket health care costs equaled four and one-half months of Social Security checks for the average elderly person. Social Security is over three-quarters of the income of the elderly who are less than 25% above the poverty line."

## **H**ouse committees cut NASA FY 92 budget

The House Budget Committee in mid-April, trying to divide too little money among too many agencies, slashed the administration's \$15.75 billion FY 92 request for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration by \$1.3 billion. On April 12, the space subcommittee of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, made cuts in the Space Station Freedom and Exploration Initiative programs with the knowledge that the Budget Committee cuts will overshadow whatever the Science Committee authorizes.

In hearings before the Science Committee, NASA Deputy Administrator J.R. Thompson agreed with a number of congressmen that the Space Station will have been cut so much that it will not make sense to continue the program. Overall, even supporters of space exploration in Congress are not optimistic that the 10% real increase in NASA spending recommended by the panel of space experts chaired by Martin Marietta director Norman Augustine, can be met in this year's budget.

In testimony before a Senate sub-

committee on April 16, NASA Administrator Richard Truly said that further cuts in the program would set back plans to have a functioning space station by the turn of the century, the present NASA goal.

Leading the pack calling for more cuts was Sen. Al Gore (D-Tenn.). The latest cuts mean that the budget and the magnitude of Space Station Freedom will have been reduced seven times since its initial formulation.

## **W**hite House subverts new civil rights bill

The White House is attempting to sabotage negotiations between civil rights groups and major corporations intent on reaching some compromise on a new civil rights bill. Civil rights advocates report that White House Chief of Staff John Sununu and White House Counsel C. Boyden Gray have been telephoning corporate executives belonging to the Business Roundtable to pressure them to leave the negotiations.

The Civil Rights Bill of 1991 now pending in Congress is opposed by Bush on the grounds that it would impose mandatory minority quotas in hiring and promotion. Similar legislation was vetoed by Bush last year. The White House seems not to want any compromises which would allow for passage of the bill, since Bush intends to use the racial issues involved to appeal to white workers during the presidential election.

On April 12, Vernon Jordan Jr., a Washington lawyer, and William Coleman, chairman of the board of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., met with Sununu and Gray to urge them to stop pressuring the members of the Business

Roundtable.

In the course of the negotiations, it has become apparent that quotas are not an issue, but rather that companies were attempting to put a ceiling on damages that women could collect in suits for gender discrimination.

The legislation is deemed necessary since most of the gains made in civil rights as a result of the the 1960s civil rights legislation have been reversed by recent Supreme Court decisions.

## **F**armers attack legality of trade 'fast track'

In testimony before the Senate Finance Committee, Leland Swenson, president of the National Farmers Union (NFU), questioned the constitutionality of the "fast track" negotiations on the U.S.-Mexican free trade agreement.

"The very fact that you worry about 'free riders' points out one of the biggest problems with the 'fast track' authority," said Swenson. It gives our negotiators a "blank check" that someone else fills in. "It leaves Congress only with a decision as to whether or not to sign the check and pay the bill. That's not the way our system of checks and balances is supposed to work or does work in other policy areas."

Swenson said that "in regards to the issue before us, the Constitution of the United States speaks clearly that it is the responsibility of Congress 'to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.' Congress should fully exercise that responsibility and not limit itself to a yea or nay vote to rubberstamp the actions of the administration."