

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Whitten prepares fight for relief for farmers

Rep. Jamie Whitten (D-Miss.), the 81-year-old chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, is preparing to take on the Bush administration in his most important area of responsibility—agriculture. Whitten is seeking increased farm spending for fiscal year 1992, and has advanced a proposal which would grant \$1.75 billion in emergency relief for farmers suffering from floods in the South and Midwest, and drought in the West. Farmers who have lost more than 35% of their crops due to “damaging weather or a related condition” would be eligible.

Whitten is locking horns with Senate Appropriations Committee chairman Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), Office of Management and Budget Director Richard Darman, and with George Bush. Darman has angered Whitten by calling Whitten’s relief proposal “unwarranted” and threatening a presidential veto.

Whitten and Byrd came into conflict over the 1992 spending bill for agriculture and rural development when Byrd presented a Senate bill which was \$422 million less than the House version and which shifted funds to pay for public works and law enforcement programs. In retaliation, Whitten has refused to expedite House-Senate conference action on the federal pay raise which Byrd pushed through the Senate in mid-July.

Helms ties Soviet aid to aid cutoff to Cuba

The Senate approved on July 24 as a part of the Foreign Aid bill, an amendment by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) which would deny any U.S. aid to the Soviet government until it cuts off all

direct and indirect military and economic aid to Cuba. The amendment was tacked on to the Senate foreign aid bill, despite the fact that the bill itself contains no aid to the Soviet Union. The Helms amendment would prohibit aid until the President has certified for the Congress that the Soviet Union has ceased such assistance.

A more far-ranging amendment, sponsored by Sen. Larry Pressler (R-S.D.) and passed the same day on a voice vote, placed 20 conditions on any aid package to the Soviet Union, including cuts in military spending, “terminating modernization of its strategic forces,” and providing “full transparency” with respect to “data necessary for the United States to determine the creditworthiness of the Soviet Union and its ability to repay debt.” The Pressler amendment would also make any aid to the Soviets contingent on them taking concrete steps towards a market economy.

The Pressler amendment would not be enforced if the President declared that such aid to the Soviet Union were in the national interest.

Bush wins Senate vote on China MFN status

The Senate voted 55-44 on July 24 to place major restrictions on the continued issuance of Most Favored Nation status to the People’s Republic of China, far short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a certain veto by President Bush. In an attempt to appease the Chinese leadership, Bush has demanded that no restrictions be placed on China MFN status.

The Senate bill makes the MFN status conditional on changes in Chinese policy in the areas of human rights, trade, missile exports, and other issues.

The House passed a similar bill earlier in July with more than the two-thirds majority needed to override a presidential veto.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry immediately criticized the Senate vote, although a Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed his pleasure that the vote was passed without the majority needed to override a veto.

The bill included an amendment sponsored by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) and Sen. Tim Wirth (D-Colo.), which required that the President certify that the Chinese government does not support or participate in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Senate restores funding for U.N. Population Fund

The Senate on July 26 approved an amendment which authorizes a renewal of U.S. funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and authorizes a payment of \$20 million to the agency.

Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) introduced the amendment on July 25 with the stipulation, designed to assuage opponents of the amendment, that none of the funds would go to the People’s Republic of China. U.S. funding to the UNFPA was cut off in 1985 by the Reagan administration because of its financing of programs through which the Chinese government promoted forced abortions and sterilizations as a method of “family planning.”

The Senate voted to end debate on the Simon amendment 63-33, thus averting threatened filibusters against the measure. The measure was then approved by voice vote.

The Simon amendment was

strongly pushed by population control advocates such as Sen. Tim Wirth (D-Colo.). Aware of the tremendous opposition to the bill, especially by right-to-life advocates on Capitol Hill, backers of the amendment have tried to obfuscate the relationship between the UNFPA program and the coercive sterilizations in China.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), an opponent of the bill, refuted some of these attempts in his floor comments shortly before the vote on July 26. Helms called any contribution to the UNFPA "a contribution to programs of coercion. . . . The UNFPA has long had a hidden agenda as a strong advocate of coercive state population control," said Helms, calling it not simply a "contributor" to the Chinese population program. Helms cited the comments in 1981 of UNFPA executive director Rafael Salas, where Salas called the Chinese model "a superb example of integrating population programs with the national goals of development."

Although President Bush has been a long-time advocate of such population control measures, he has threatened to veto the bill in an effort to maintain his cover in the right-to-life movement. But Bush associate Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) in fact helped Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.) in pushing the measure through. He assured Congress that he was "optimistic" that Bush would sign the bill if it were "modified" to meet some of his "objections."

Dems move to extend unemployment benefits

Senate and House Democrats moved on July 25 to extend unemployment benefits for up to 20 more weeks for states with unemployment rates over

8%. The Democrats want President Bush to declare the additional funding an "emergency" to avoid having to make equal spending cuts or tax increases.

The Bush administration has threatened to veto any extension as unnecessary, since it claims the "recession" is ending.

Sen. Don Riegle (D-Mich.), noting Bush's foreign adventures and string of foreign aid requests, declared, "The administration is quite prepared to find these emergencies all over the world. But they're not willing to see the emergency here at home and provide the money for our own people."

Armed Services Committee revises SDI program

Aborting the original version of a multi-layered Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the Senate Armed Services Committee, chaired by Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), endorsed the deployment within five years of a ground-based anti-missile system, ostensibly aimed at defending the U.S. population against a small-scale or accidental missile attack.

While the administration has praised some aspects of the decision, it has withheld its direct support.

Although the committee's proposal virtually eliminates the SDI as formulated by President Reagan in March 1983, it nevertheless aroused the ire of arms control advocates who claim that even the miniature anti-missile system would tend to undercut the controversial Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and cause problems for ratification of the freshly signed Strategic Arms (START) Treaty.

Under the committee's plan, a limited missile defense with 100 interceptors would be deployed at Grand Forks,

North Dakota by 1996. The ABM Treaty already permits such a limited system to be deployed, as the Soviets have already done at a site near Moscow. But the committee legislation also calls for renegotiation of the ABM Treaty to allow similar systems to be deployed at other sites, and to permit the deployment of sensors in space, now prohibited by the ABM Treaty.

Opposition to the proposal from within the committee was expressed by Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) and three other Democrats.

Rep. John Kyl (R-Ariz.), an advocate of a space-based program, expressed concern that the committee's proposal could lead to a deal with the Soviets which would allow ground-based missile defenses but rule out space weapons. "Not including an opening for a space-based interceptor at this point in time will set a dangerous precedent," said Kyl, addressing a seminar of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis in mid-July.

Panel picked by Congress proposes cut in logging

An "independent panel" picked by the Congress has proposed reducing federal timber sales from 5 billion to 1.7 billion board-feet annually in order to protect the spotted owl, the July 25 *Washington Post* reported. The 66% cut in logging in the national forests is expected to cost 38,000 jobs and \$1.8 billion a year in personal income.

The scientists on the panel are: John Gordon, dean of Forestry and Environmental Resources at Yale University; Jerry Franklin of the University of Washington; K. Norman Johnson of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University; and Jack Ward Thomas, chief research wildlife biologist at the U.S. Forest Service.