

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Space Station survives cuts in NASA budget

The House voted overwhelmingly on Oct. 2 to provide the entire \$2 billion asked by the Bush administration for Space Station Freedom. The money allotted, however, will be taken from other NASA programs. Congress virtually eliminated all funding for the National Aerospace Plane, and voted to kill the infrared telescope. NASA normally has received an annual budget increase of 10%, but the increase this year is only 3%.

The House Appropriations Committee had earlier voted to kill the Space Station, but after a massive lobbying campaign by the aerospace industry, supporters succeeded in restoring the funds.

NASA considers the Space Station the core of its research planned for the next several decades and essential for establishing manned bases on the Moon and on Mars, a program which the overall cuts in the NASA budget are making more and more unlikely.

Bush uses education funds for speech-making

President Bush used funds from the Department of Education to publicize his visit to a junior high school in northwest Washington Oct. 1. The incident has drawn fire from Capitol Hill.

In a highly unusual operation, the filming of the presidential visit was not handled by the television networks but by a private firm paid by the Department of Education. The Department of Education also arranged for live television and radio coverage of the speech.

House Majority Leader Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) called the televised spot "paid political advertising" by the

Department of Education.

House Education and Labor Committee chairman Rep. William Ford (D-Mich.) demanded that the department explain the use of its funds for the speech. After receiving a letter from Department of Education Deputy Secretary David Kearns explaining that the President's televised message to school children represented "an important part of the mission entrusted by statute" to the Department of Education, Ford threatened that he would "straighten out" the matter "in front of the public."

Parental leave bill may be veto-proof

The Senate passed a parental leave bill 65-32 on Oct. 2. The three absentees, all Democrats, are known to be in favor of the bill, giving it what appears to be two votes more than the 66 needed to override a threatened presidential veto. Congress has yet to succeed in overriding a veto by George Bush.

It is an open question, however, whether the Republican backers of the bill will remain in support of it, if and when it is vetoed by the President.

The proposal, sponsored by Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) and Sen. Christopher Bond (R-Mo.) would require employers with more than 50 workers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year, as well as uninterrupted health benefits, to workers for birth or adoption of a child, or if the worker or a close family member becomes seriously ill.

The bill is now under consideration by the House, which passed similar legislation last year with a 237-187 majority—not enough for a veto override. In order to attract more votes, House sup-

porters are working on a variant of last year's bill which would decrease the number of part-time workers and senior-level employees covered by the leave benefits. Similar restrictions placed on the Senate bill succeeded in garnering significant Republican support in that chamber.

EPA upgrade a boon to environmental lobby

Senate approval for the creation of a Department of the Environment on Oct. 1 has given a boost to efforts for further and more intrusive environmental restrictions on U.S. industry.

The bill creating the new department assigns "protection of the domestic and international environment a priority which is at least equal to that assigned to other functions of the federal government."

It also gives added authority to internationally agreed upon environmental regulations expected in the wake of the planned U.N. Conference on the Environment in 1992, the so-called Earth Summit or Eco-92 to be held in Brazil.

The legislation calls for increasing "the size of the budget and the number of federal civil servants associated with environmental protection," and it establishes a Bureau of Environmental Statistics to analyze and publish comprehensive environmental data from around the country.

Term-limitation bill targets leading Dems

A move is afoot to place legal limits on the length of time a congressman or senator can serve in his or her post. Ostensibly aimed at making the elec-

toral process "more democratic," the campaign is generally considered by Washington insiders to be part of a plan to clean out some top-ranking Democrats who are throwing obstacles in the way of Bush policymaking.

President Bush himself has repeatedly expressed the wish to restrict the terms of U.S. legislators. Similar limitations have been placed on state legislators in Oklahoma and Colorado, and term limitations are on the ballot in 16 other states.

In the state of Washington, there is a move to place restrictions on the terms of U.S. congressmen and senators, a move which may well be in violation of the U.S. Constitution. The Washington State legislation would limit a senator to two terms and a congressman to three terms. It would also be applied retroactively, meaning that all the legislators now in Congress would be excluded from running for another term, including Speaker of the House Thomas Foley. The campaign in Congress is being promoted by freshman Rep. Scott Klug (R-Wisc.).

More funds passed for S&L bailout

The House Banking Financial Institutions Subcommittee voted 20-16 on Oct. 8 to provide the Resolution Trust Corp. with \$80 billion in order to finish the cleanup of savings and loan institutions within two years.

A provision was added to the administration request which could lead to a presidential veto. Rep. Joseph Kennedy (D-Mass.) sponsored an amendment to the bill which would require that \$60 billion of the new bailout spending be taken from tax increases or spending cuts in other programs. The

pay-as-you-go amendment would blow a hole in last year's budget agreement between Congress and the administration, which exempted money for the S&L bailout from calculations for the budget deficit.

Kennedy says that the amendment would force the President and Congress to deal with the ballooning budget deficit, expected to top \$350 billion in the fiscal year that began Oct. 1. The legislation will now be considered by the full House Banking Committee before being sent to the floor for consideration.

Dems set to rework budget agreement

Prodded by new projections of the Congressional Budget Office that the federal deficit will rise, dip, and then skyrocket between now and the year 2001, House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) has authorized a long-term budget review despite the effect this might have on last year's five-year budget agreement. The CBO report indicated that absent further action by Congress, the overall national debt will soar to \$5.1 trillion within 10 years, or more than 50% of Gross National Product.

On Oct. 7, House Budget Committee chairman Leon Panetta (D-Calif.) released a set of deficit reduction proposals, including a proposal for a 40% cut in military spending and the elimination of 8 of 14 cabinet departments by the end of the decade. Panetta is also calling for tax increases totaling \$1.3 trillion between now and the year 2001, and spending increases totaling \$370 billion for certain areas including education and health care.

Democrats and Republicans began meeting on Oct. 8 to conduct the

budget review. The administration insists that it is not interested in reopening the budget agreement, but it may be forced to in the light of the new CBO forecasts.

Republicans in Congress, however, are not so dogmatic about a budget renegotiation. "I'm not against looking into the future," said House Minority Leader Robert Michel (R-Ill.). "But if that's going to absolutely signal a reworking of the current budget agreement, I want to be very careful about that."

Panetta has warned that if the two sides do not reach agreement on long-range budget priorities, "then it's war."

Pennsylvania race looked at as national barometer

The latest polls indicating that Sen. Harris Wofford (D-Penn.) is narrowing the lead which former Attorney General Richard Thornburgh had over him in the beginning of the Pennsylvania race for U.S. Senate, is causing some Washington campaign consultants to look more at the economy as an election issue. Wofford has conducted a low-budget campaign emphasizing the economy and medical insurance.

Wofford, who served in the Kennedy administration, was a relative political unknown when he was appointed Pennsylvania's senator after the sudden death in April of Sen. John Heinz. It was generally thought that Wofford did not have much of a chance against Thornburgh, who is a former governor of Pennsylvania.

This election is also being seen as a test for the Bush administration, since Thornburgh was such a high-ranking Bush administration official, and President Bush has personally campaigned for Thornburgh.