

Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

Pelosi bill would axe China MFN status

At a press conference on Capitol Hill on April 22, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) presented legislation which would end normal trade relations with China unless Beijing makes major reforms in the areas of human rights, weapons sales, and trade practices. The House bill, introduced on the same day, is co-sponsored by House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Assistant Majority Leader David Bonior (D-Mich.).

The bill gives the President some flexibility in dealing with China by re-authorizing China's Most Favored Nation trade status through June 1994. After that, the lower tariff rates under MFN would be continued for all products of private and joint-venture enterprises. However, if no progress has been made by that time in the indicated areas, the lowered tariff rates would be suspended for the products of state-owned and -operated enterprises only.

The conditions China must meet under terms of the legislation include: 1) ceasing religious persecution in China and Tibet; 2) ceasing unfair trade practices; 3) stopping missile shipments to Syria, Iran, or Pakistan; 4) allowing human rights monitors to attend trials and inspect prisons; and 5) adhering to a joint declaration on Hong Kong.

Similar legislation was passed by both houses of Congress with large majorities in the past, only to be vetoed by President Bush. The measure was opposed by Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), who said it would hurt U.S. workers and farmers since China purchased more than \$8 billion of American goods last year. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), who supported the legislation during

President Bush's term, indicated that he preferred diplomatic pressure rather than the trade sanctions in the Pelosi bill.

GOP filibuster kills 'stimulus package'

White House and Senate Democratic leaders gave up on April 21 in their attempt to break the Republican filibuster against the Clinton administration's \$16.3 billion stimulus package, intended to revive the economy. Ironclad Republican opposition in the Senate, and defectors within Democratic ranks, forced the administration to abandon its efforts to pass the entire package. Some \$4 billion in emergency unemployment benefits was stripped out of the package and passed by the Senate by voice vote.

The most significant part of the proposal, the investment tax credit, a measure which had been an integral part of the Kennedy recovery in the 1960s, provoked opposition even from Democratic leaders such as Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, and Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

Supporters of the package expressed their frustration. "Yesterday's vote against the President's plan to stimulate the economy was a defeat for all Americans," said Rep. Jim Blyburn (D-S.C.) on April 22. "It was a vote against the people of our country who have virtually lost faith in the nation's willingness to respond to their dreams and aspirations. They see a government which has once again turned its back on their hopes for the future."

Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-N.Y.) commented, "Poor children will go without immunizations, at-risk urban

youth will not find summer jobs, our damaged roads and bridges will remain in disrepair, and our homeless families will continue to live without shelter and proper services."

In spite of the defeat at the hands of Republicans led by Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), who knows absolutely nothing about economics or the economy, the administration will pursue some elements of the package.

Republicans, elated by their victory, are now threatening to filibuster to block other proposals. Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) has announced that he will oppose any proposed new taxes.

Fawell lambasts cuts in nuclear energy funding

In floor comments on April 23, Rep. Harris Fawell (R-Ill.) scored the Clinton administration's near-elimination of funding for nuclear power research in the Department of Energy. The DOE budget request eliminates the advanced liquid metal reactor (ALMR), the fast flux test facility (FFTF), and the modular high-temperature gas-cooled reactor (MHTGR) programs, and also terminates programs for space applications.

To Fawell, the DOE budget request appeared particularly ironic in light of Clinton's announcement in his April 21 Earth Day address, of the nation's commitment "to reducing our emissions to their 1990 levels by the year 2000."

Fawell said, "It is critical that the nation continue to develop long-term energy options that reduce or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. While it is important that energy conservation and renewables and natural gas receive continued and increased emphasis, there is simply no way our

economy can continue to grow without additional supplies of energy—particularly electricity. And there simply is no viable long-term alternative to the use of nuclear energy to supply a significant fraction of that additional electricity.”

Aspin calls for further cuts in SDI budget

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced on April 26 that he was requesting that Congress take \$750 million from the budget for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and other areas of defense spending to pay for the U.S. military's effort in Somalia. Aspin said that his request to “re-program” these funds to pay the Somalia bill was meant to ensure that the money does not come from daily military operations.

“Reduced defense budgets severely limit the flexibility we have to do things like the Somalia reprogramming,” said Aspin. “The problem is we’re talking about a fiscal year 1993 budget which is already tight when it comes to funding sources.”

In the Aspin request, \$80 million would be taken from the SDI, \$274 million from immediate spending on new executive and cargo jet aircraft, and \$136 million from lower-priority military equipment and other areas.

Volkmer criticizes ATF for ‘Gestapo-like’ tactics

Rep. Harold Volkmer (D-Mo.) called on April 20 for the House to investigate the tactics of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms in the Waco raid as well as in other, similar raids it has carried out around the country.

“Prior to Feb. 27,” he said, “the

followers of David Koresh were citizens that, to my knowledge, had caused no problems of any kind in their community. On Feb. 28, 1993, following what appeared to be a staged-for-TV assault by BATF on the compound they were living in, they all became heinous killers, according to BATF. For many years I have observed the Gestapo-like tactics of BATF, as they have gone beyond normal police procedure and instead staged dangerous assault-type raids on individuals’ homes and businesses. If, as some believe, BATF fired the first shots on Feb. 28, did, in fact, those inside the compound have a right to defend themselves? At the very least, the reason for the assault, purported illegal weapons, would not have resulted in a death sentence. Why, after 51 days, was yesterday’s action deemed necessary? Why were family members never allowed to talk to their loved ones in an attempt to persuade them to come out?”

The fire, which killed most of the inhabitants, including children, in the Branch Davidian compound, has caused concern on Capitol Hill. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.) are calling for hearings by their respective Senate and House Judiciary subcommittees.

Penny introduces election reform bill

Rep. Tim Penny (D-Minn.) has introduced legislation, consisting of three bills which would alter present election law, making it easier for third-party candidates to run for office.

The Fair Elections Act of 1993 would streamline the process for third-party candidates to gain access to the ballot in elections for President, U.S. senator, and U.S. representative. The bill establishes a uniform re-

quirement that candidates for President and U.S. senator file petitions with signatures equal to one-tenth of 1% of the number of persons who voted in the last statewide federal election, or 1,000 signatures, whichever is greater. For the Congress, the limits are one-half of 1% of the number of voters in the last congressional election, or, if there was no previous election, 1,000 signatures.

The second bill would require election-day registration in every state, and the third bill, the Democracy in Presidential Debates Act of 1993, would institutionalize presidential election debates.

Mica would impose environmentalism abroad

On April 26, Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.) introduced a bill, the Global Environmental Cleanup Act, which would use the threat of cutoff of U.S. foreign assistance to force nations to abide by U.S. environmental standards.

Mica complained that “both directly and indirectly, America provides financial aid and foreign assistance to countries that are destroying our planet.” He complained that “this lack of environmental pollution controls in foreign countries provides foreign manufacturers with an unfair competitive advantage in the global marketplace.”

The bill would also require the State Department to publish an annual report that would evaluate environmental laws, policies, and practices of nations. “For the first time we will make environmental cleanup a criteria for receiving U.S. financial support and aid,” he said. Nations particularly targeted were Egypt—legendary, he said, for its “environmental atrocities”—Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Korea, and Taiwan.