

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Senate ratifies START II treaty

Three days after President Clinton called for ratification of the START II strategic arms limitation treaty with Russia in his State of the Union address, the Senate did just that by a vote of 87-4. The treaty commits both the United States and Russia to a level of about 3,500 nuclear warheads, including no more than 1,750 deliverable by submarine, by the year 2003, as well as eliminating multiple-warhead missiles from the arsenals of both sides.

Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) said that, with 3,500 warheads, "the United States would remain capable of holding at risk a broad enough range of high-value political and military targets to deter any rational adversary from launching a nuclear attack against the United States or its allies."

Dole introduces bill to inhibit U.N. tax

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) introduced a bill on Jan. 22 to prevent the United Nations from independently raising funds through taxation, borrowing, or other schemes. Dole said that he was acting in response to news reports that U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Gali was considering such action.

According to Dole, Boutros-Gali said earlier that, such power would mean, "I will not be under the daily financial control of member states." Dole admitted that the U.N. is facing a shortfall of funds, and that the United States was responsible for a large part of this debt, over \$1 billion. However, "the Republican Congress has been unwilling to provide funds to clear up this debt because of the often promised and never delivered reform." He said

that "while Boutros-Ghali and his supporters consistently point to the multi-billion-dollar shortfall, they ignore, cover up, and excuse outrageous abuses occurring regularly throughout the U.N. system." Dole suggested that the U.N. should address its own rampant corruption as the way to address its funding problems, rather than "taxing American citizens."

The bill, entitled "Prohibition on United Nations Taxation Act of 1996," has three main provisions: It lays out the conclusion of Congress that the U.N. has no legal authority to tax American citizens; it prohibits U.S. payments to the U.N. if it attempts to impose any taxation scheme; and it cuts off funds to any U.N. organization that develops or advocates taxation schemes.

Dole concluded that "as long as the United Nations spends its time on global taxation and not on its severe shortcomings, real reform will be impossible."

Debt ceiling increase stopped by Senate

On Jan. 26, the Senate tabled, by a vote of 46-45, an amendment to the continuing resolution to keep the government open sponsored by Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), that would have increased the public debt ceiling by \$500 billion, enough to last until about May 1997.

Moynihan argued that the public debt and the annual deficits are purposeful tools to starve programs that opponents couldn't abolish legislatively, a strategy begun in 1983 under Ronald Reagan. "Simply make it impossible to go forward because there are no funds, and indeed we looked the unthinkable prospect of default in the

very face [at that time]," he said, asserting that, with President Clinton's declaration in his State of the Union speech that "the era of big government is over," the strategy has worked. Moynihan suggested that the Congress "go forward now to extend the debt ceiling in the context of an agreement to bring about a balanced budget, not to put the United States at risk in a world in which we are the largest debtor."

William Roth (R-Del.) countered, that to open the continuing resolution to amendment, would "create an obstacle that will most certainly keep this bill from passing and result in a government shutdown." He said that there's no hurry to raise the debt ceiling because Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin had only asked Congress to do it by March 1. "Consequently," Roth said, "there's no urgency to extend the debt limit now, not if it means once again shutting down the government."

NAFTA hurting Florida fruit-growers, says Goss

Rep. Porter Goss (R-Fla.), in remarks on the House floor on Jan. 23, called on the Clinton administration to act more forcefully "against price-based import surges from Mexico" of tomatoes and other winter fruits and vegetables. He said that the safeguards in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) "have not lived up to our hopes," and announced that he was drafting legislation "calling on the President to live up to the promise he made" in November 1993, "and to protect our growers from potentially unfair Mexican trading practices."

Goss concluded that "those of us who felt NAFTA would be good for the United States of America want to

be certain that we correct the sore spots that are there, if they are correctable. If not, we will have to excise those sore spots with legislation. In any event, once we see those sore spots, the time is now to move and we have seen them and we must move."

Goss later reported that Sens. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) and Bob Graham (D-Fla.) had attempted to attach language to the continuing resolution to keep the government open, to "correct a technical problem faced by Florida growers because of existing definitions in section 202 of the 1974 Trade Act." Though also backed by House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.), the effort failed because of concerns in the Senate about adding any amendments to the resolution.

Goss reported that he was introducing legislation that would direct the President to "suspend current NAFTA arrangements as they relate to winter tomato production, pending his certification to the Congress that safeguard provisions and relief measures are functioning effectively and efficiently."

Defense Authorization compromise passed

On Jan. 24, the House passed, by a vote of 287-129, a compromise version of the Defense Authorization bill that President Clinton had vetoed in December 1995. Two provisions that Clinton had objected to most strongly—for the deployment of a national missile defense system, and requiring the President to certify to Congress that any deployment of U.S. forces under U.N. operational control is in U.S. national security interest—were dropped from the bill. Clinton is now expected to sign it, even though it au-

thorizes \$7 billion more than the administration had asked for.

House National Security Committee Chairman Floyd Spence (R-S.C.) said, "These issues are of basic, fundamental principle," and, accordingly, "a majority of the conferees believed that no deal with President Clinton on these issues . . . was far preferable to a bad deal." The provisions were therefore dropped rather than watered down. "Nobody should think," he added, "that this is the last this Congress or this President has seen of these issues."

The Senate followed suit on Jan. 26, by a vote of 56-34. Armed Services Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) blamed the veto on "the administration's uncompromising opposition to deploying a system to defend the United States against ballistic missiles," and he vowed that "Republicans remain determined to enact forceful NMD [national missile defense] legislation in the near future."

Kassebaum, Kennedy seek vote on health insurance

On Jan. 25, Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee Chairman Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) and ranking member Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) joined in calling for the Health Insurance Reform Act to be brought to the floor for a vote, after President Clinton endorsed the bill in his State of the Union message on Jan. 23. The bill has been subjected to "holds" by conservative senators ever since it was passed out of Kassebaum's committee by a unanimous 16-0 vote last August.

The two main provisions of the bill would limit the ability of insurers and employers to exclude coverage due to preexisting health conditions, and pre-

vent insurers from dropping coverage when an individual changes jobs or when a family member becomes ill.

Kassebaum said that the bill "is a very positive step forward that will reduce barriers to health coverage for millions of working Americans."

Kennedy added that the reason the bill has been held up, is because "they know if the legislation is brought to the floor, it will pass overwhelmingly."

Johnston bill targets electric utilities

Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-La.) introduced a bill on Jan. 25 to establish a means by which the electric utility industry will be deregulated. He said that the goal of his bill is "to ensure that electricity markets will become competitive so that regulation will be unnecessary. Our goal must be to ensure price competition for electricity which will create savings, efficiency, and innovation." However, deregulation has hurt every sector of the economy in which it has been applied.

Johnston claimed that provisions in his bill will prevent the predicaments faced by other industries that have been deregulated, most particularly that associated with "stranded costs," the high costs of serving all customers under the old regulatory system "which cannot be recovered in a competitive market."

He also guaranteed that universal access to electric service would not be harmed by his bill. "It's essential to clarify that the states are not preempted from ordering retail access. . . . Overlooking this clarification will bring years of litigation, impeding American consumers from receiving the benefits of lower electricity prices."