

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

North Korean government bypassed on food aid

The House added an amendment to the Agriculture Appropriations bill on July 24, that prohibits any assistance to North Korea, "except for assistance that is provided to needy people by the United Nations World Food Program or private voluntary organizations . . . and not by the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."

The amendment, sponsored by Christopher Cox (R-Calif.), is a knee-jerk reaction to British propaganda claiming that the North Korean military is being kept fed at the expense of the general population, an assertion disputed by the WFP. Cox argued that his amendment was necessary to prevent U.S. food aid from being used to subsidize the North Korean military.

Tony Hall (D-Ohio) supported the premise of Cox's argument, declaring that "not one jot of food should be used to feed North Korea's standing army." However, Hall confirmed that food aid donated through the WFP "is reaching the children and ordinary civilians who are facing starvation, and that is verified by independent monitors." The amendment was approved by a vote of 418-0.

Climate-change talks must not harm economy

On July 25, the Senate unanimously voted up a resolution which warns the Clinton administration not to accept any treaty that comes out of negotiations set for Kyoto, Japan in December, that would exempt developing countries from emissions limits on so-called "greenhouse" gases or "would result in serious harm to the economy of the United States." The unusual feature of the debate is how Democrats

and Republicans came from opposite directions to reach the same conclusion, as expressed in the resolution.

Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), who co-introduced the resolution with Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), questioned the alleged science behind the global warming propaganda. "If anything has become clear during Congressional hearings on this issue," he said, "it is that the science is unclear, that the scientific community has not even come close to definitively concluding that we have a problem."

Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), who chaired the House Agriculture Committee during the 104th Congress, pointed to the devastating effects new emissions restrictions would have on farming, and asked, "How on earth are we going to do this and still feed America in a troubled and hungry world?" The answer from the State Department negotiators, he said, "has not been forthcoming."

Other arguments by Republicans amounted to little more than partisan sniping at the Clinton administration, however.

Democrats complained that the United States should not be a signatory to a treaty that exempts 133 countries, including China and India, from emissions restrictions that it imposes on the United States and other developed countries. In an argument that typifies Democratic concerns, Byrd said, "There is sufficient evidence of a probable trend toward increased warming of the Earth's surface resulting from human interference in natural climate patterns." However, he said, "I do not think the Senate should support a treaty that requires only half the world to endure the economic costs of reducing emissions, while developing countries are left free to pollute the atmosphere and, in so doing, siphon off

American industries." Part of Byrd's argument, echoed by some Republicans, was a lengthy attack on China, because it would soon become the largest consumer of coal in industry and, hence, the largest producer of "greenhouse gases."

While some of the arguments in favor of the resolution are certainly flawed, the unmistakable message to the White House is that any treaty that comes out of the Kyoto negotiations will face an uphill battle in the Senate.

Rules-fight in House linked to GOP turmoil

The turmoil that has recently been tearing the House Republican Party apart, spilled onto the House floor during debate on the Agriculture Appropriations bill beginning on July 22. The bill originally came to the floor on July 16 without a rule limiting debate or amendments. However, after a late-night meeting on July 22, the Rules Committee decided to bring up a rule that severely restricted who could bring up amendments, and reduced debate time on amendments to an absurdly short ten minutes, five minutes for each side. The rule was approved by a vote of 222-206.

Republicans claimed that the rule was made necessary because of delaying tactics by Democrats, including their demands for roll call votes on eight bills considered under suspension of the rules, a procedure normally used for bills that are non-controversial in nature and passed by voice vote. Because a roll call vote technically requires 15 minutes, but, in fact, takes longer, at least two hours of the session on July 22 was taken up with votes on minor bills, pushing the debate on the agriculture bill back to 10 p.m.

David Obey (D-Wisc.) said, after a heated debate on the Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program, that it was the Democrats who tried to obviate the roll call votes, but were rebuffed by Republicans. He said, "I would suggest we have a fundamental problem with the leadership of the majority party in this House which is apparently in chaos. That chaos is spilling over into an incredible exhibition of arrogance on the part of the majority party in the Committee on Rules."

Funding for NED restored in Senate

On July 24, Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) challenged the need for Federal funding of the National Endowment for Democracy, during Senate debate on the Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary Appropriations bill. The bill came to the floor without any NED funding, but Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) brought up an amendment to provide the NED with \$30 million, to be paid for by a similar reduction in the State Department's capital budget. Most of the debate was characterized by high praise for the "good work" the NED has done in Mongolia, eastern Europe, and elsewhere.

In fact, the NED is an arm of a "secret, parallel government" apparatus, partially exposed in the Iran-Contra scandal. It conducts foreign policy for private interests, outside the control of the responsible U.S. government agencies.

Bumpers began his attack on the NED by calling it a "boondoggle" that is taking forever to die. He said the NED "has as good a record of meddling in foreign elections as any organization the Earth has ever known."

He criticized the NED for its high administrative cost, and the fact that, last year, it gave out \$4.125 million each to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Free Trade Union Institute of the AFL-CIO, the International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute, the last two being arms of the respective national parties, leaving only \$9 million for grants which went out to 218 different entities for an average of \$41,096 per grantee. "That will not even buy first class air tickets to get to the election in Cambodia or wherever," he said.

Bumpers and Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), who joined him in his criticism, consider the NED to be a waste of taxpayers' money. Other than Bumpers' one reference to the NED's meddling in foreign elections, there was no discussion of how the NED is engaged in the overthrow of foreign governments, most recently in Mexico (see *EIR*, July 18, p. 42). Lugar's amendment passed by a vote of 77-22.

Tax, budget bills set to move ahead

On July 28, the Clinton administration and Congressional Republicans concluded marathon negotiations on the budget and tax bills which have been in conference for over two weeks. On the Democratic side, the agreement includes \$35 billion in education tax credits; \$24 billion for children's health insurance, to be partially paid for by a 15¢ per pack increase in the cigarette tax (what President Clinton described as "modest" tax relief); and \$3 billion to "move welfare recipients to private sector jobs."

The Democrats also gained some concession from the Republicans on

the \$500 per child tax credit. Under the agreement, it will be partially available to families with incomes down to \$18,000, whereas the Republicans had wanted the bottom limit to be \$24,000. Republicans claimed that giving the credit to families that receive the earned income tax credit would be "welfare."

Among those joining Clinton on the South Lawn of the White house the following morning to celebrate the agreement were Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and House Minority Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.), both of whom had been lukewarm to agreements with Republicans since the original May 2 budget deal. At press time, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) had yet to be heard from. Gephardt actively opposed the budget and tax bills the first time they came up for floor debate in the House.

Republicans gained big changes in the capital gains tax and the estate tax. On the estate tax, the individual exemption would rise from the current \$600,000, to \$1 million, over ten years. The capital gains tax rate is to be cut to 20% for upper- and middle-income families, and to 10% for lower-income families.

Medicare will be hit by cuts of \$115 billion, mostly in the form of reduced payments to providers, and medical savings accounts will be expanded to 390,000 people. Three Medicare provisions dropped from the agreement were testing for affluent senior citizens, raising the eligibility age from 65 to 67, and charging a \$5 copay for home health care visits.

Still to be resolved is the issue of the treatment of workfare recipients. The agreement assures them minimum wage and workplace protections, but the language has yet to be worked out.