

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Senators Are Skeptical of 'Crusader' Decision

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 16, to defend his decision to cancel the Army's Crusader artillery system. He was met by skepticism from members of both parties. Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) noted that, in the space of a few weeks, the Pentagon's attitude toward the Crusader changed from full support, to a 30-day study of possible alternatives, to outright cancellation, before that study was even completed. "It is Congress's responsibility," he said, "to determine whether we should proceed to develop, produce, and deploy Crusader."

Rumsfeld's strongest critic was Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), who quoted earlier testimony by Pentagon officials in support of the Crusader. He complained that not enough analysis had been done to justify the cost of the decision.

Rumsfeld, who was accompanied by Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Pete Aldridge, told the committee that "the decision to recommend termination of the Crusader was not reached precipitously," but "after months of review, wide-ranging discussion and in-depth planning and analysis." Later in his testimony, Rumsfeld added, "The debate about Crusader is about whether to spend roughly \$9 billion more to procure some 480 Crusader howitzers, or instead to use funds" to procure precision munitions that can be fired out of other guns, and to add Global Positioning System guidance to the Army's artillery rocket systems.

Neither Levin nor Inhofe were completely satisfied with the testimony. After Wolfowitz attempted to explain the schedule the Department

followed in the cancellation decision, including the sudden lobbying of Congress, Levin told him he was surprised at the shortened schedule "because if sudden lobbying of us causes people just to change plans that way, to cancel a system . . . it seems to me that anything goes around here, because we're being lobbied all the time on everything." Inhofe argued with Rumsfeld about the logistics required to deploy the system and told him and Aldridge that their responses were actually "the best argument" for waiting until the study of alternatives is complete before making the cancellation decision.

House Passes New Welfare Reform Bill

The House GOP leadership rammed through its welfare reform proposal on May 16, by a vote of 229 to 197, which is similar to that proposed by President Bush earlier this year. The main feature of the bill is the increase in the required number of work hours per week, from 20 to 24 for each recipient, and the increase in the participation rate for a state to be eligible for grants from 50% of recipients to 70% by 2007. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas (R-Calif.) declared that the 1996 welfare reform has been a success, and that the new bill "is an attempt to put legislation together that will focus on areas that need greater attention, to maximize the opportunity to move people from poverty to productive work."

The Democrats, while not arguing with the GOP's presumption that the 1996 act promoted the common good, did say that the new bill was anything but an improvement. Their arguments fell into three general areas: lack of flexibility for the states, lack of fund-

ing for child care, and reduction of access to job-training programs. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) told the House that the bill "would require states to take resources away from job-training programs and child-care programs into workfare programs" which would deny people "real jobs and the opportunity to move up into the workplace." He added that the bill takes away flexibility to provide educational services to welfare recipients.

Another argument that the Democrats raised was the cost to the states. Cardin said that the bill will cost states \$15-18 billion to comply, almost two-thirds of which will be for child-care programs. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) noted that that amounts to a \$280 million unfunded mandate for the state of Washington, "where they are already \$1 billion in the hole."

Free-Trade Debate Continues in the Senate

Reality continued to intrude into the Senate as debate on the Andean Trade Preference Act continued through its fourth week. John Edwards (D-N.C.) focussed attention on the textile industry, particularly in the Southern states, in remarks on the floor of the Senate on May 15. He reported that North Carolina has lost 122,000 jobs; Georgia, 95,000 jobs; South Carolina, 61,000; Alabama, 35,000 jobs; and Virginia, 23,000 jobs, all since 1997.

In some towns in North Carolina, the textile mill provided one-quarter of the jobs, and "now the mill is gone and hundreds of people are looking for work and the town is devastated." Edwards did not challenge the premise of the bill itself, but rather offered an amendment to add negotiating objectives for textiles, like those already

contained in the bill for agriculture and other sectors.

On the other side, Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) offered an amendment to strike the wage insurance provision from the bill. That provision was part of the agreement negotiated with the White House by Senators Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Charles Grassley (R-Ia.), the week before. Gregg complained that the provision “goes fundamentally against the free-market society.” It pays older workers who lose their jobs as a result of trade the difference between the wage of their new job, if it pays less, and the wage of the job they lost. Gregg tried to argue that this subsidizes workers to be less productive.

Baucus ridiculed Gregg’s arguments the next day, telling the Senate that wage insurance “gives an incentive to displaced workers to find employment more quickly” by “cushioning them against income losses they might experience after losing a job.” He added that wage insurance gives workers an incentive to take entry-level jobs “and train on the job.” He also argued that the wage insurance provision is less costly, because it gets workers out of the program more quickly. Baucus’s argument won out, as Gregg’s amendment was tabled by the Senate by a vote of 58 to 38.

Senate Heads for Fiscal Gridlock

The collision of several pieces of legislation with the Memorial Day recess is almost certain to guarantee partisan gridlock in the Senate. On May 21, Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) appeared with other GOP members to call on Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) to call up the fiscal 2003 defense authorization bill as the first or-

der of business after the Senate returns in June, to be followed by the defense appropriations bill. The GOP supports the authorization bill, which passed out of the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 10, except for the fact that the Democrats succeeded in cutting about \$1 billion from missile defense. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.) predicted that missile defense will be a “contentious issue” when the bill comes to the Senate floor.

Daschle has an entirely different agenda, not supported by the Republicans, with the possible exception of John McCain (R-Ariz.). Speaking after the GOP press conference, Daschle said that he hoped to bring up the fiscal 2002 supplemental appropriations bill, hate crimes legislation, and possibly a bill to create a commission to investigate the failure of government agencies to act on pre-Sept. 11 intelligence information regarding possible terrorist attacks. The latter effort is being co-sponsored by McCain and Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.). Daschle said his intention is to move “reasonably quickly.”

The GOP is not only agitating for the defense authorization bill, but also is demanding movement on the budget. Daschle still has not indicated when he’ll bring up the budget resolution, even though he has said repeatedly that he intends to do so.

Mineta Gives Report On Aviation Security

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee held a hearing on May 21, on the implementation of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, six months after it was signed into law by President Bush. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, who was accompanied by the

head of the new Transportation Security Administration, John MaGaw, reported that the new agency was in the process of hiring and training 50,000 airport screeners, and acquiring and installing explosives detection equipment at 429 airports. He warned, however, that the \$4.4 billion that the Bush Administration has requested for airport security was being targeted for cuts by some members of Congress. “They say that we cannot afford the security commitment that was made six months ago,” he said. “The truth is, we cannot afford less than the full \$4.4 billion that the President proposed.”

Committee Chairman Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) expressed skepticism toward the Bush Administration’s efforts, complaining that Congress was not really serious about the war on terrorism. He noted that while bills to address seaport security, rail security, and terrorism insurance have been languishing since late last year, debate on cloning and estate taxes goes on. “The White House,” he said, “will stand up to bin Laden, but they won’t stand up to DeLay and Arney,” the House Majority Whip and Majority Leader, respectively.

One issue that was disposed of with minimum controversy however, was that of allowing pilots to carry guns in airliner cockpits. MaGaw, in explaining his decision not to authorize that, said that the only people who should be carrying guns on airliners are the air marshals, because “they have special firearms training, which is much more difficult, much more strenuous, than any other firearms,” except for some special military forces. He indicated that the pilots need to maintain “positive control” of the aircraft, which means “get it on the ground as quickly as you can, regardless of what’s happening” in the passenger cabin.