

Congressional Closeup by Kathleen Klenetsky and Ronald Kokinda

Defense conference committee stacked

On the recommendation of House Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), Speaker Tip O'Neill has stacked the House participants in the House-Senate conference on the 1987 defense bill. The conference faces a major fight to resolve differences between the Senate-passed anti-defense bill and a far more anti-defense House version.

In a move that Rep. Jim Courter (R-N.J.)

House conferees will not be allowed to vote on all issues, but only those which come before their panel in the conference (there are eight major panels).

liberals much greater strength. A member of the Armed Services Committee, Courter said that his committee "has precious little to do with the important issues that our committee has jurisdiction over." It's "rigged in the sense that the votes are predetermined," he said.

For his part, Aspin was open about the anti-defense outcome which he was striving for. "I would love to have more liberals on the committee," Aspin was quoted in the *Washington Times*. "The committee is not where the House is."

President Reagan increased his pressure on the conference on Sept. 23, when he told a group of supporters at the White House that he will veto the bill if it contains the House version. The House bill "would pull the rug out from under our arms negotiators in Geneva and imperil our national security," the President said. He said that the House ban on nuclear testing "is a back door to a nuclear freeze. . . ."

Among the more radical anti-defense provisions in the House bill is a ban on funding for nuclear weapons that would carry the United States over the limits of the 1979 SALT II treaty; a ban against most nuclear-weapons testing, which is essential to maintain the reliability of the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal—and if it need be shown, the SDI—a one-year ban on anti-satellite weapons tests, when the Soviets have had an operational ASAT system for some time; and a rejection of funding for work on new chemical weapons, an area in which the Soviets have a tremendous lead.

A fight on funding levels for the Strategic Defense Initiative is also certain as the House made a radical cut in the President's requested level of \$5.4 billion, reducing it to \$3.2 billion. The Senate has recommended \$3.9 billion. But the defense subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee has added \$1.2 billion additional funds which would be added to the SDI program if the President finds that the arms-control talks have failed.

Congress maneuvers to avoid automatic cuts

The House and Senate passed slightly differing versions of an additional \$15 billion worth of budget-deficit reduction measures onto the reconciliation bill the week of Sept. 22, in what is expected to be a successful effort to avoid automatic across-the-board program cuts under the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget-deficit reduction act. The Pentagon, especially, had warned of the consequences of such automatic

cuts, projecting a 600,000 cut in troop strength as a result.

On Sept. 19, the Senate passed \$14.5 billion in savings by a vote of 88 to 7. This included one-time sales of Conrail and the Naval Petroleum Reserve, prepayment of loans and sale of loan portfolios from several agencies, greater revenues based on better tax collection enforcement, and other minor provisions. On Sept. 24 the House passed 309 to 106 a package of a net \$15 billion in savings, which differed by including \$2 billion in revenues from user fees, a \$3 billion increase in spending for Medicare and Medicaid recipients, reauthorization of major housing programs, and \$1 billion in savings by across-the-board program cuts including defense.

The White House reportedly objects to the size of the user fees, the across-the-board cuts, and the housing bill.

These savings reduce the projected deficit to \$154 billion, within \$10 billion of the \$144 billion Gramm-Rudman-Hollings ceiling which avoids the automatic cuts.

Critics of these reported savings charged that the Congress was using "smoke and mirrors" to come up with deficit reduction measures. Rep. Bill Frenzel (R-Wisc.)

deficit cutting by "pencils instead of knives." But Senate Budget Committee chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) said it was "the best that we could do."

Immediately after passage, the Senate rejected S.J.R. 412 to initiate automatic cuts if the House did not come up with its savings, by an overwhelming 15 to 80 vote. Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) argued that the automatic cuts of 5.6%

in defense and 7.6% in domestic programs would strike "at the heart of our military readiness budget." "I do not believe that the world situation has relaxed to the point where such reductions are wise," Byrd said.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kans.) S.J.R. 412 in case the House and Senate are unable to resolve the differences over where the savings will come from.

Lash out at press criticism of drug bill

In letters to the editor of the *Washington Post* on Sept. 24, Rep. Lawrence Smith (D-Fla.),

Task Force on International Narcotics Control, and Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.),

Drug Task Force, lambasted the news media for their criticisms of the House passed drug bill and for the press's soft on drugs attitude.

Smith singled out *Post* reporter Edwin M. Yoder, Jr. for his Sept. 18 "analysis" of the drug bill in an article entitled, "We Know Who Will Lose the Drug War," which he said "particularly offended" him. "His calling the current drug situation a 'nuisance' shows a complete lack of understanding of the devastating impact drugs have had on our society," Smith said. "Rather than an innocuous 'expression of social defiance and alienation,' drugs kill. Just ask any of the families of the recent victims of cocaine overdoses in south Florida."

Lewis added criticisms of the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* for

their pro-drug coverage. He defended the death penalty and the expanded role of the military in the war on drugs as "two of the bill's strongest provisions," and noted that the death penalty amendment passed by an overwhelming 296 to 112 vote.

Smith pointedly noted that such press coverage "belittles the thousands of federal, state, and local law-enforcement officers who fight drugs and the resultant drug-related crimes."

Farm sector in trouble? Get rid of it!

Two leading Democratic legislators have proposed a unique solution to the crisis now devastating American agriculture: Get rid of food.

This exaggeration is only slight. At a Washington press conference Sept. 23, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), a radical populist with ties to the international grain cartel, teamed up with Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), self-styled centrist who entertains delusions of being elected President in 1988, to unveil a bill that would replace the current system of voluntary production controls with a program of forced cutbacks. The plan would drive up agricultural prices, by slashing production of such key items as grain, dairy products, etc.

Under the provisions of the so-called Save the Family Farm bill, the amount of grain each farmer could produce, under subsidized payments, would be determined by quotas based on domestic consumption, export demand, and reserve requirements.

Gephardt and Harkin are motivat-

ing their proposal partly by pointing to the supposed savings it would produce by reducing government-supported farm-price supports. "How on earth can we justify a \$30-billion-a-year farm program that puts millions of dollars into the pockets of wealthy farmers but also puts a third of our family farmers out of business?" Gephardt asked at the press conference.

But for all their alleged concern about the plight of farmers, the proposal "would be devastating to American agriculture," says Ewen M. Wilson, assistant deputy for economics at the Department of Agriculture. "Essentially you're talking about a massive down-sizing of agriculture. You would be shutting down a big portion of rural America. It's true you could get prices up by shutting down production. But that would make us uncompetitive in the world. It would provide foreign producers incentives to expand their own production and sell the products to us."

Similar criticisms come from Ross Karves, chief policy analyst for the American Farm Bureau Federation. According to Karves, the mandatory production controls would "end up putting a lot of farmers out of business. . . . It's what we went through in the '40s, the '50s, and the '60s, this idea . . . that you can create prosperity by not producing." During the period 1949 to 1969, when mandatory controls were in effect, the number of farms dropped from 5.6 million to 2.9 million, he said.

The same thing would happen under the Harkin-Gephardt proposal, Karves maintains. "If you're going to produce only half as much wheat, why do you need all the wheat farmers?"