

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Byrd to continue as majority leader

Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) survived a challenge to his leadership of the Senate Democrats and is expected to become the new Senate Majority Leader in the 100th Congress. The Democrats take over the Senate with a 55 to 45 majority.

Control of every committee and subcommittee chairmanship in the Senate will shift to the Democrats in January 1987.

Byrd was left as the only candidate for Majority Leader, which will be decided in the Democratic organizational meeting to be held on Nov. 20, when Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (La.) withdrew his candidacy on Nov. 11 because he just "didn't have the votes." Five of 28 senators whom Johnston had tentatively lined up to support him switched to Byrd after reported promises of choice committee assignments and a pledge by Byrd that he will not seek the leadership post again in two years.

Byrd encapsulated his attitude toward the administration when he commented: "We know there will be confrontation." That is the same attitude that Byrd has toward U.S. allies, specifically where protectionist trade legislation is concerned. Byrd has already said he would support efforts to tell the Japanese that U.S. defense of the western Pacific was contingent upon access to Japanese markets for U.S. goods. "We ought to link the two," Byrd said.

Among the issues that Byrd intends to put on the immediate Senate agenda are the two nuclear test ban treaties, which will set the stage for fights on arms control policy, the Threshold Test Ban Treaty and the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty,

the Clean Water Act, reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, agriculture, and trade legislation.

Foreign policy

The platform from which Senate Democratic liberals will most vehemently put forward their appeasement and disarmament positions will be the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to be chaired by Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, a man who speaks proudly of family ancestors who fought against the American Revolution. Immediately upon the Senate takeover, Pell said that "two of the most urgent priorities for Democrats will be arms control and the situation in Central America."

Pell is the blue-bloods' blue-blood, the man who held hearings on the zero-growth Global 2000 report championed by many in the Carter administration, and who is active in many facets of its Malthusian policy thrust. Pell is also key in back channels to Moscow, led Senate trips to meetings with Andropov, and has been at the forefront of the nuclear freeze and efforts to kill the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Pell and committee Democrats, who are overwhelmingly liberal, including Sens. Joseph Biden (Del.), Paul Sarbanes (Md.), Alan Cranston (Calif.), Christopher Dodd (Conn.), and John F. Kerry (Mass.), will push to keep the U.S. within the never-ratified SALT II treaty limits and to redefine the ABM treaty along the lines of Soviet demands; and will attack the SDI, ASAT systems, nuclear testing, and chemical weapons.

Pell will back up Kerry's pro-Sandinista efforts in Central America, and

will seek to cut off aid to Jonas Savimbi's UNITA, fighting Cuban troops in Angola. Kerry, sometimes referred to as the Sandinista lobby in the Senate, is also expected to head the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee because, being from the Forbes family, he has raised a lot of money.

Defense

The more serious threat to defense and national security interests is located in the shift of the Senate Armed Services Committee to Sam Nunn of Georgia, a man who is "pro-defense" until it comes time to spend the money. Nunn is close to Soviet agents-of-influence Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, and the "military reform" crowd at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

In 1984, Nunn collaborated with Kissinger and this crowd in advancing his amendment to pull U.S. troops out of Europe. The amendment failed by only three votes in the Senate at that time, but if passed, would have most certainly led to decoupling and a split between the United States and Europe, and possibly to dissolution of NATO itself. Nunn's attitude is one of "watching and waiting," with the ever-present threat to reintroduce the amendment.

Nunn is dangerous because he has a reputation for being pro-defense, but strategists know that Europe is only credibly defended with the neutron warhead, SDI systems for use on a tactical level or the Tactical Defense Initiative, and increased air defense. Nunn is opposed to the SDI, the key program for defense of Europe and the United States, and the program the Soviets consider the only significant

stumbling block to their goal of world domination.

Nunn has said that he will try to "get a consensus on SDI." A Nunn staffer said that that consensus was already reached last year which is to slow down the SDI research program substantially. Nunn supports a severely limited role for SDI to a point defense of military assets as advocated by Brzezinski.

As he urges the Europeans to do more, Nunn is prepared for further defense cuts in the U.S. defense budget. "My agenda would be to try to get more efficiency from the current defense expenditures because we have got to do something about the overall fiscal problem," Nunn said. He is already going to the Joint Chiefs of Staff to involve them in a process of cutting the budget in an effort to outflank Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger and President Reagan.

Economics

A realization among Senate Democrats that they did not necessarily win the Senate, but that the economy defeated the Republicans, is apparent in the comments of Byrd and the new chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, Lawton Chiles (Fla.), who are attempting to put a "growth" label on new committee activity. A spokesman for Chiles, who has acted in concert with Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) as ranking member of the Budget Committee for several years, emphasized that Chiles will put "much, much, much more focus on growth initiatives," in the areas of science, technology, and education. Talk about lessening the constraints of deficit reduction targets will still, even if re-

laxed, keep the Senate debate within the bounds of cutting defense and the insane parameters of deficit reduction by budget cuts and tax increases.

Led by Byrd, Lloyd Bentsen of Texas, and Ernest Hollings of South Carolina, who will chair the tax writing Finance Committee and Commerce Committee, respectively, protectionist trade legislation will be revived, partly as a political payoff for AFL-CIO support in the elections. Bentsen will begin trade hearings in February and hopes to have legislation ready for floor action by the summer. Bentsen's office said that the trade bill will contain a "market opening strategy," and may have little relation to previous trade legislation, H.R. 4800, passed by the House. Bentsen is close to the banking industry, and the committee, as it did in the recently passed tax reform package, will continue to act as the tax technicians for the Wall Street banks.

The Banking Committee will be reclaimed by its former chairman William Proxmire (Wisc.), a man who conceded to Paul Volcker that the failure of congressional action to cut the deficit had left Volcker with no choice but the high interest rates which accelerated the destruction of U.S. production. Proxmire fulminates against the big banks, but he is anti-dirigist and will do nothing to protect productive sectors. He may put a slightly different spin on banking deregulation, but has supported this push to deregulate. As the U.S. banking system becomes ever more jeopardized, Proxmire's comment that the way to save the banks and the country is to cut the deficit to zero, comes to mind.

The Agriculture Committee will be chaired by Patrick Leahy (Vt.), who claims that the committee will be

turned into a vehicle for rural America. Leahy represents mainly dairy interests, yet he voted for both recent cuts in the dairy program. Leahy has already hinted that he may move in the direction of mandatory production controls, an outlook that was advanced by Tom Harkin (Iowa) last year.

Domestic policy

Senator Edward Kennedy (Mass.) has decided to chair the Labor and Human Resources Committee to supposedly breathe new life into many social programs. However, Kennedy will have to change colors once again if he is to advocate higher spending levels. Kennedy has spoken about a zero-based budgeting approach, where every new dollar spent will have to come from a program already cut or phased out. His office did not comment on whether this is the senator's current thinking, but Kennedy did shock many in coming out in favor of a constitutional amendment for a balanced budget.

Kennedy taking Labor leaves neo-liberal Joseph Biden as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Biden will be a major check on Reagan court nominees, and on new-right social issues such as prayer in schools, etc.

Among the other new committee chairmen are David Boren (Okla.) at Intelligence, John Stennis (Miss.) at Appropriations, Quentin Burdick (N.D.) at Public Works, and Bennett Johnston (La.) at Energy and Natural Resources. There are positive instincts here, but on the whole, these moderates, such as Boren and Stennis, have never shown the capacity to resist the Democratic leadership.