

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Wright stresses economic issues, offers bipartisanship

Members of the 100th Congress met on Jan. 6 and were sworn into office. The House elected Rep. James C. Wright, a Democrat from Texas, as the new Speaker replacing the retiring Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, potentially the most significant change in the new Congress.

Among the first order of business in both houses is the creation of select committees to probe the Iran/Contra scandal, passage of the clean water bill, trade legislation, and, as always, consideration of the budget.

In his acceptance speech as Speaker, Wright focused on the economic crises facing the nation, and offered congressional cooperation to the President.

"We enter the third century with serious problems," Wright said. "In the past six years, this government has doubled the national debt. . . . Unless we make dramatic changes, the public's debt will triple in the short span of this one decade."

Wright continued: "We have witnessed the growth of a staggering trade deficit," which is "closing our factories, drying up American jobs, eroding our industrial base, [and] making us dangerously dependent upon foreign countries." "Just four years ago," he added, "we were the world's largest creditor Nation. Today we are the world's largest debtor Nation." Wright also cited the "plight of the family farm, the state of America's banking and credit systems, the need to rehabilitate our aging public infrastructure, [and] our still unsatisfied thirst for true excellence in public education. . . ."

The "unaccustomed phenomenon" we now face, Wright said, is that

Americans today are not doing as well as their parents, that it is more difficult to buy a car or a home. "We are not ready to accept downward mobility. Our future is not behind us."

Wright offered Reagan bipartisan cooperation: "[We] seek not confrontation, but cooperation. . . . Just as the nation does not want an imperial presidency, neither does it want or need an enfeebled presidency. It deserves a Congress that is thoughtful, helpful, creative. We present ourselves to the President not as a rival center of power . . . but as a full and equal partner."

Wright cited legislation "designed to combat terrorism and deadly drugs" as examples of bipartisan cooperation. He obviously hopes it will extend into efforts to revitalize the economy.

Clean water bill on the fast track

The Water Quality Act of 1987, reintroduced in the new 100th Congress, is headed for quick passage in both House and Senate with enough support to override any presidential veto.

This clean water bill, which appropriates \$18 billion for, mainly, construction grants for new sewage treatment facilities, passed both houses of the 99th Congress unanimously before being pocket vetoed by President Reagan after the Congress adjourned. On Jan. 8, the House again passed the measure by a vote of 406 to 8.

In the Senate, Quentin Burdick (D-N.D.) Environment and Public Works Committee, introduced S. 1 with over 70 cosponsors. Minority Leader Robert Dole has introduced a cheaper, \$12-billion substitute on behalf of the administra-

tion, but this has so little support that such Reagan stalwarts as Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), and Steve Symms (R-Idaho) are backing the \$18 billion version.

Dodd moves to cut off Contra funding

Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), the new chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Western Hemisphere subcommittee, introduced S. 184 on Jan. 6, the most far-reaching of several bills introduced in the new Congress to end aid to the Contras.

The bill, upon Senate passage, would cut off all military and humanitarian aid and channel it into relocation and settlement of the Contras, and into the "civilian democratic forces inside Nicaragua."

It would cut off U.S. assistance to any third country that aided the Contras, giving the "Government of Israel or the Government of South Korea" good reason to reject any such administration request, Dodd said.

The bill would also reestablish a \$300 million economic assistance fund for other Central American nations, which had been promised and passed in the 99th Congress.

Dodd said that he had just completed a visit with the leaders of Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, and with Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, and said that the Sandinistas were prepared to enter into agreements banning foreign military bases in the region and placing limitations on the "size and force structures of the military organizations in each of the Central American states."

Dodd, who has been openly sympathetic to the Sandinistas, is expected to take the point in opposition to

the administration's Central American policy. On this basis, House Democrats allowed the even more radical Rep. George Crockett (D-Mich.), who has old ties with the Communist Party USA, to chair the Western Hemisphere subcommittee in the House.

Select committees to probe 'Irangate'

In its first order of business, the Senate on Jan. 6 and the House on Jan. 7 voted 88 to 4, and 416 to 2, respectively, to create special select committees to probe the issues of arms shipments to Iran and diversion of profits to the Contras.

The resolutions authorizing the committees in both houses are broad enough to investigate both the Reagan and Carter administrations. It also authorizes a probe into the role of foreign governments.

The purpose of the select committee is "to conduct an investigation into . . . all matters which have any tendency to reveal the full facts about" the National Security Council, any other department, agency, official or employee of the U.S. government, "any foreign government," or any individual or corporation which were involved in the "direct or indirect sale of arms or . . . provision of materiel, funds, or other assistance to Iran."

Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), who will chair the Senate committee, has already indicated that he will ask officials of Israel to testify. Inouye has already made one private visit to Israel since the scandal broke.

The date that the committee would conclude its inquiry and issue its report was the most partisanly contested point in both houses. Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) and other Re-

publicans, fearing that the scandal would continue until the 1988 presidential election year, strenuously fought to end the committee by April 15.

Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) said that the committee would not be rushed. The Senate said that the committee would finish on or before Aug. 1, but included a provision that could extend the work until Oct. 31. The House committee ends its work on Oct. 31.

The House panel's chairman, Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), said: "At this point, [we] simply cannot determine where the trail of evidence might lead. There are a lot of things we don't know . . . and therefore the scope has to be broad enough to take into account where that evidence might lead."

In a related move on Jan. 5, the Senate Intelligence Committee rejected an administration plea and voted 7 to 6 not to release its findings. Sen. William Cohen (R-Me.), who will also sit on the select committee, voted with Democrats who argued that a release of preliminary findings could jeopardize the work of the independent counsel.

Aspin dumped from House Armed Services

In a stunning reversal for the KGB gaggle in Congress, Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.) was ousted as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. The House Democratic Caucus unceremoniously dumped the former McNamara whiz-kid by a razor-close 130-124 vote Jan. 7.

Aspin was reportedly shaken and upset at his unexpected defeat. "We were stunned," wailed Pat Schroeder, an ultraliberal Democrat from Colo-

rado. An Aspin aide, asked by a reporter to confirm reports that he had been "dumped," started shrieking: "Dumped! Dumped! What do you mean, dumped!" The aide paused and then said: "Well, I guess you could say he was dumped."

Earlier in the day, the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee had handily endorsed Aspin and the congressmen's supporters predicted his reappointment. But liberals, who said Aspin had misled them on the MX and Contras, joined conservatives in defeating him.

Controlled by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Aspen Institute, Aspin has used his image as a "military thinker" to undermine the Strategic Defense Initiative, cut defense spending, and ready a withdrawal of American troops from Western Europe. His removal from the chairmanship tends to confirm reports received by *EIR* that a factional consensus has been reached in U.S. policy-making circles concerning Moscow's war-winning objectives.

The more conservative Rep. Marvin Leath (D-Tex.), and Rep. Charles Bennett (D-Fla.), have been running a tough campaign to unseat Aspin. Liberal Rep. Nicholas Mavroules (D-Mass.) has also entered the race.

Leath has received the public endorsement of 5 of the 7 Armed Service subcommittee chairmen, plus 12 other committee members. As a "courtesy," the Steering Committee has now voted 16-11 in favor of the senior Bennett, who was narrowly defeated by Aspin in 1984, when Aspin ran a successful coup against longtime Armed Services Committee chairman Mel Price (D-Ill.)

Aspin is frantically trying to call in chits in an attempt to wrest the chairmanship back.