

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Wilson proposes commission on AIDS

Senator Pete Wilson (R-Calif.) held a press conference Feb. 24 to announce that he will introduce legislation shortly to create a national commission on AIDS.

Unfortunately, the bill's content makes it quite apparent that Wilson—who vociferously opposed Proposition 64, the anti-AIDS referendum which was on the California ballot in last November's elections—is still catering to the homosexual lobby and the "GAY-CLU."

A Wilson staffer, reiterating that the senator opposes mandatory AIDS testing, reported that one of the bill's main goals is to deter "discrimination" against AIDS carriers.

Under Wilson's proposal, the Health and Human Services Secretary would appoint 10 members of the scientific community to the commission, which would be authorized for an initial five years.

Working under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences, the group's responsibilities would include: advising the President and Congress on policies and programs to reduce the incidence of AIDS; making recommendations regarding AIDS-related health care and research; monitoring the spread of AIDS; and evaluating research programs and health efforts.

In addition, the commission would be charged with protecting the "civil rights" of AIDS victims, and would be required to study the problems encountered by AIDS victims in obtaining and maintaining housing, employment, and other areas of discrimination.

Wilson's proposal is backed by Sens. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), David Durenberger (R-Minn.), Alan

Cranston (D-Calif.), Al D'Amato (R-N.Y.), Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), Bill Bradley (D-N.J.), and Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.). According to Wilson's office, the White House is expected to endorse the bill, and Wilson is confident that it will pass.

Senate Armed Services Committee to target SDI

The Senate Armed Services Committee voted 18 to 2 on Feb. 24 to endorse a nonbinding recommendation to the Senate Budget Committee, to accept the administration's request for a \$312 billion defense budget in FY 1988—a 3% real increase over the current year.

After years of underfunding of defense, however, this seemingly pro-defense vote by a committee chaired by Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) may have been designed as an exercise in futility.

The committee first made clear that its "priorities are different than the President's." A committee source indicated that defense R&D would be targeted for reductions, and "Star Wars will be cut."

At the same time, the 3% real growth figure seems to be a standing joke on Capitol Hill. Armed Services expects the Budget Committee to take its recommendation and "throw it in the wastebasket." Both committees seem to expect a defense budget with real growth only if the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings balanced budget targets are eased. Otherwise, defense will end up with real cuts in the budget, rather than growth.

House Democratic leaders told arms-control negotiator Paul Nitze and Defense Undersecretary Richard Perle that efforts to expand testing of the

SDI would be countered by House action to impose funding cuts crippling to the SDI program. House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.) emerged from the meeting to say that Nitze and Perle were told it would be a "grave mistake on the part of the administration to rush pell-mell into an expansion of the arms race" by expanding tests. "If [Reagan] tried to do so," Wright said, "he might expect a majority to rebel and deny him the money to do so."

Nelson pushes for expanded NASA budget

Rep. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), chairman of the Space Sciences subcommittee of the House Science and Technology Committee, called for a \$225 million increase in the NASA budget on Feb. 25.

Nelson opened his hearings by saying that "the NASA budget is and has been inadequate to carry out the space program in a manner expected by the American people."

The increase would bring the NASA budget to a paltry \$9.74 billion total. The additional funds would be used for expendable launch vehicles, the Air Force Titan 34D rockets, to orbit the advanced technology satellite, and the Mars Observer satellite.

The Mars Observer would be launched in 1990, two years earlier than planned, and is designed to map the surface composition of Mars, study its atmosphere, look for a magnetic field, and map wind patterns over a Martian year.

Nelson would like to commit NASA and the nation to a goal of a manned mission to Mars in the next century. But as a spokesman for the congressman admitted, a decision on

the national goal is yet to be reached. A national commitment would most likely have to come from the President, in order to secure the necessary resources.

Aspin reports on Reykjavik arms control

The Defense Policy Panel of the House Armed Services Committee, under its chairman, Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), issued a report Feb. 19, "Reykjavik and American Security," on the October 1986 U.S.-Soviet summit in Iceland.

Aspin's major point was that "Reagan passed up a good deal at Reykjavik" by refusing to abandon the Strategic Defense Initiative. "The President took his own Star Wars rhetoric too seriously and gave up a good deal by treating Star Wars as untouchable," Aspin said in releasing the report.

If Reagan had given up on SDI, Aspin claimed the 50% reduction in ballistic missiles discussed at Reykjavik, combined with a U.S. Midgetman land-based mobile ballistic missile, would "double the number of American ICBM warheads that would survive a Soviet attack." Why one would choose the Midgetman instead of a cheaper, more powerful rail mobile MX missile, was not discussed. Neither were the assumptions of survivability of mobile missiles, which is particularly questionable in light of increased chances for Soviet cheating. Evidence of Soviet violation of arms-control treaties was not analyzed.

The report also criticized the "zero option" Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) proposal, by suggesting that "a few" INF missiles should be left in Europe in order to comfort the Euro-

peans. A military assessment of the need for Pershings to be based in Europe, and the overwhelming nuclear superiority the Soviets would have in Europe even without their SS-20s, was never addressed.

While the report starts on the premise of "Soviet capability to wipe out virtually all American land based missiles in a single swift strike," the report claims that bombers and submarines would survive such an attack and be able to retaliate—a dubious proposition at best.

The end result of Aspin's arms-control assumptions, is that the overwhelming Soviet offensive nuclear capability can be neutralized without the SDI.

Brazil moratorium puts Congress on edge

Treasury Secretary James Baker faced some skeptical congressional questioning on the debt crisis Feb. 24, in the wake of the debt moratorium declared by Brazil. The first chance to question Baker on Brazil came in a previously scheduled appearance before the Senate Appropriations Foreign Operations subcommittee chaired by Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hi.).

Inouye asked questions on how much exposure American banks have in Brazil, the potential impact of the moratorium, etc. He then asked Baker to estimate the impact of the moratorium on other nations. "What is the danger that the Brazilian action will have an impact on other Latin American debtors to effect similar suspensions?" Inouye asked. While Baker expressed his usual "confidence that the problem will be resolved," and that Argentina, for example, was in a different situation than Brazil, Inouye pointed out that the Argentine finance

minister was in Sao Paulo, Brazil, discussing the moratorium at that moment.

Inouye, a master of understatement, concluded by asking: "Notwithstanding the Equadorian moratorium, and the Brazil moratorium, and the possibility of an Argentinian moratorium, do you think they are cooperating" in these debt negotiations? "Your message to the banks is not to panic but to hang on?" he asked.

Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) told Baker that banks should be putting up reserves, since there was a chance "the loans to Brazil will be considered bad debts," and said banks "ought not to be paying dividends" when they were paying them out of bank capital. "It may become necessary to bail out American banks," Specter warned. They will "come back to Congress upon a great calamity" asking for a bailout, which Specter seemed to believe was a necessary step.

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) questioned Baker about the economic degradation that takes place as nations are told that "the only viable way" to pay debts is to "increase exports in the short term." Baker denied that the United States was giving such advice to these nations; he did not confirm that the International Monetary Fund was.

Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) asked Baker whether a debtors' cartel was being formed, and about Sen. Bill Bradley's (D-N.J.) debt forgiveness plan. Baker said he agreed with Bradley that we must find a way for these nations to grow, but that could only take place with the lines to international financing remaining open. Nobody mentioned that Peru's high growth rate was achieved after it decided to limit debt payments to 10% of its foreign earnings.