

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Senate SDI foes push for crisis on ABM Treaty

Senate opponents of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), led by Senators Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), are attempting to force a "constitutional crisis" over the interpretation of the ABM Treaty to either achieve major new arms control limitations on the SDI, or program funding cuts.

On March 12 Biden, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee introduced Sen. Res. 167, the "ABM Treaty Interpretation Resolution," which seeks to specify what the Senate ratified. The Judiciary and Foreign Relations Committees held the first of two joint hearings on March 12, to marshal their arguments.

Section 8 declares that "development, testing, or deployment of any sea based, air based, space based, or mobile land based ABM systems or components for the purpose of countering strategic ballistic missiles or their elements in flight trajectory, including ABM systems or components involving technologies not in existence when the Treaty was ratified, would be inconsistent with the provisions of the Treaty and would require an amendment to the Treaty."

Since October 1985, the administration has "moved slowly but inexorably toward a constitutional confrontation with the Senate," Biden charged. If Reagan doesn't adhere to their interpretation, SDI funding will be "cut dramatically from current levels," Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) said.

Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, backed up this assault with three speeches on the Senate floor March 11-13. Nunn claimed that "notwithstanding the ambiguities, the negotiating record con-

tains substantial and credible information which indicates that the Soviet Union did agree that the development and testing of mobile/space-based exotics was banned."

Nunn admits that the United States and Soviets "have not reached a meeting of the minds" on the precise meaning of such important words as "development," "component," "testing in an ABM mode," and "other physical principles." In addition to declassifying the negotiating record, Nunn urges arms control efforts be used to enter into "a comprehensive agreement on offense and defense" to supersede the current debate.

Boren-Byrd bill leads campaign finance reform

The "Senatorial Election Campaign Act," S. 2, sponsored by Sens. David Boren (D-Okla.) and Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.), is the Senate campaign financing proposal with the most political backing.

The bill would "establish a voluntary system of campaign spending limits for Senate general elections tied to partial public financing." If a candidate chose to participate, he would be eligible for public financing if he were to first raise \$250,000 from individual contributions of \$250 or less, 80% of which would have to come from the candidate's own state. Contributions of \$250 or less raised beyond the threshold would then be matched up to an overall campaign spending limit of \$600,000 plus 25¢ for every voting-age individual in a state. The candidate or his immediate family could contribute no more than \$20,000 in personal funds.

Independents or third-party candidates could get matching funds but only up to 50% of the overall spending limit, obviously giving a significant edge to a nominee of the party system.

Non-participating candidates would no longer be entitled to the benefits of lowest unit rate costs for television advertisements.

Allowable political action committee (PAC) contributions would be reduced from \$5,000-\$3,000 per PAC, with an overall limit of \$175,000 to \$750,000 of PAC contributions depending on state size. Party campaign committees would be limited to \$2 million per two-year election cycle.

Independent campaign expenditures would also be limited to \$25,000 per individual or group. If this limit were exceeded and the funds spent against a candidate or for his opponent, the participating candidate would get public funding in the amount by which the \$25,000 limit is exceeded.

If a non-participating candidate first exceeds the spending limit, and then exceeds twice the spending limit, the participating candidate is first eligible for twice the amount of tax dollars, and then all spending limits are lifted, respectively.

At best, this system locks in the current high level of campaign spending. At worst, it opens up the potential for more political abuse and party control—using tax dollars!

Bentsen maneuvers to save U.S. oil production

Senate Finance Committee chairman, Sen. Lloyd Bentsen (D-Tex.), introduced the "Energy Security Act of 1987" on March 10, the latest effort to save domestic oil production.

The bill, S. 694, would require the President to submit an annual report to Congress projecting the dependence on foreign oil for the next three years. If that dependence was projected to exceed 50% of domestic consumption, the President would be required to submit a plan to redress that dependence. The bill does not specify what the plan might or might not contain.

Bentsen said that an oil import fee is the "most direct" means of aiding the domestic industry. However, Bentsen has noted that such a fee has "no chance" of Senate passage without the President's support.

The latest administration stand, the Martin report produced by the Energy Department, was criticized as "madness" for its estimates and hostility to the import fee by many oil state congressmen. One set of calculations was that 900,000 barrels of production would be lost by 1995, a ludicrous figure given that 800,000 barrels of production were lost in 1986 alone. The DOE report "admits the oil import fee gives the highest production and most direct stimulant," Bentsen said, but "gave it the worst-case scenario."

House banking panel votes study of Third World debt

A House Banking subcommittee approved on March 17 mandating a study of a new facility designed to ameliorate the Third World debt crisis. The study will evaluate a proposal advanced by Rep. John LaFalce (D-N.Y.), H.R. 1423, which he introduced on March 5, and which is similar in nature to proposals by Reps. Obey (D-Wis.) and Morrison (D-Conn.), and Sens. Levin (D-Mich.)

and Sarbanes (D-Md.).

LaFalce said he was introducing his proposal because the debt crisis "may be reaching a new breaking point" with "an increasing number of countries declaring bankruptcy," and "we have an administration policy which is not coming to grips with this problem. . . . I believe that the Mexico package may characterize not the beginning of the Baker Plan," he said, "but its demise." LaFalce noted that banks have already cut off new loans, and that the debt must be reduced before "new private capital flows will or should take place."

LaFalce's proposal would create a special facility in the IMF to which 10% or more of the IMF's 100 million ounces in gold would be pledged as collateral. It would "help commercial banks voluntarily dispose of loans they no longer wish to hold," with the benefits of reducing the face value of the loan going to the debtor nation. It would also package the debt into longer-term instruments at lower interest rates.

LaFalce makes clear that conditionalities and economic restructuring of debtor economies is not to be abandoned.

Burton bill to require yearly AIDS tests

Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) announced at a press conference March 18 that he is introducing legislation "to require annual mandatory testing for all U.S. residents" for the AIDS virus. Burton was seconded by Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.), Dr. Vernon Mark of Harvard University, and A.D.J. Robertson, President of Research Testing and Development Corp. of Georgia, who had just briefed 28 con-

gressmen on the AIDS threat.

"I am introducing this legislation," Burton said, "because AIDS is a fire out of control and we're in the dark about it." He said that "mandatory testing will help to control the spread of AIDS by educating the public and providing important information to the scientific community." He also warned that "if the attitudes and practices of those infected with AIDS do not change, we may have to take more extensive measures in the future."

Burton said that "in the short run my legislation will probably be defeated," but predicted that testing will be mandatory, "in the not too distant future . . . people will demand it," he said.

Dr. Mark warned reporters that it is "unfair to say that casual transmission will not occur in the future. This is a goad to get us to do something now." Mark pointed out that we are only dealing with "stale statistics" on the AIDS syndrome, with data anywhere from two weeks to 10 years old. "We don't have any reliable data as to how AIDS is spreading today," he said. "If we make a mistake on transmission of AIDS it will be a national catastrophe."

Dr. Mark stressed the importance of retesting to "ensure that voluntarism is going to work." He, like Burton, said that if it does not, it may "indicate an overwhelming national interest to implement [additional] public health measures to prevent the transmission of AIDS."

Robertson suggested that it was "not terribly likely" that a cure would be found, and that, without testing, "we have no way of knowing whether any of our methods are working" to halt transmission.