

Congressional Closeup by Kathleen Klenetsky

Congress enlists Wall St. for austerity program

Not satisfied with the mess which Gramm-Rudman-Hollings has made of the U.S. budget process, Congress, as one of its last acts before the Christmas recess, created a supragovernmental National Economic Commission (NEC) to tell it how to run economic policy.

Established as part of the omnibus reconciliation bill, the NEC was expressly commissioned to dream up new and innovative ways of pulling the plug on the tottering American standard of living.

The group, composed primarily of "private citizens," is mandated to come up with a "deficit control" package by next March, which will be presented to the new President and Congress for implementation.

There's no doubt that the package will promote austerity in all its nasty guises. The idea for the commission came directly from the budget-cutting maniacs on Wall Street, such as Lazard Frères' Felix Rohatyn and zero-growth economist Lester Thurow, and was conduited through a group of "root-canal economics" fanatics on the Hill, primarily Sens. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and Bob Dole (R-Kans.), and Rep. Buddy McKay (D-Fla.).

Its composition bespeaks the same orientation. Members appointed thus far include Rohatyn, former Democratic National Committee head Robert Strauss, Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca, House Budget Committee chairman William Gray (D-Pa.), and Moynihan. More members will soon be selected by Republican leaders.

The NEC has the total support of the Wall Street gang, who see it as the most effective way to get Americans to stop "overconsuming." The com-

mission "is the single most important development in the last year for getting the budget under control," according to Dr. Robert Holland, head of the Committee on Economic Development. Holland believes that the United States has been "living beyond our means far too long" and that, "we have to stop consuming so much." He has "high expectations" that the commission "will not only be able to produce a package of painful economic sacrifices, but will also be able to build a popular consensus that will enable these sacrifices to be put into effect."

Congressional partisans of the NEC see it as "the next step after Gramm-Rudman," as spokesmen for Bob Dole and Buddy McKay put it. Because the commission will consist largely of members drawn from the private sector, "it'll be able to propose things like Social Security cuts, which Congress couldn't do, because they'd be subject to pressure from special interests," according to Dole aide Jim Whittinghill.

The NEC's mandate ranges across the entire gamut of federal expenditures. An aide to Representative McKay said he expects the commission to consider pulling U.S. troops out of Western Europe as a possible "budget-balancing" measure. Others expect the group to call for higher interest rates, increased taxes, and deep cuts in defense spending, including cancellation of the Strategic Defense Initiative and the MX missile.

Are the Soviets orchestrating INF debate?

A parliamentary delegation from the Supreme Soviet, in the United States at Congress's invitation, has been scurrying around Capitol Hill ever

since the Senate debate on the INF treaty began.

Congressional offices have been extremely closed-mouthed about the visitors' activities, but it is known that the delegation, headed by A.E. Voss, met with several members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which is holding the most important hearings on the pact.

The 23-member delegation also turned up at the committee's hearings Feb. 2, to hear their boy, Secretary of State George Shultz, tell the panel why it should approve a treaty that will hand Moscow de facto dominion over Western Europe.

The next day, Moscow's favorite billionaire, Armand Hammer, who has been meeting with the Soviet delegation, brought the committee's chairman, Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), out into the hall for a little chat. One source told the Feb. 4 *Washington Times*, "Some Republicans, at least, were shaking their heads about a private representative of the Soviets being able to draw the chairman out of the hearings. And it was even more surprising when they retired to a private room."

Expanding U.S.-Soviet trade to help Red Army

Rep. Toby Roth (R-Wis.) warned his colleagues that proposals for expanding U.S.-Soviet trade, which are coming from certain quarters of the business community as well as the Reagan administration, will gravely impair Western security.

In remarks published in the Jan. 25 *Congressional Record*, Roth singled out the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Trade and Economic Council, headed by agribusiness magnate Dwayne Andreas, a chum of Mikhail Gorbachov and ma-

major financial backer of Bob Dole, for its "headlong rush to sign Russian trade deals [which] will undermine America's technological edge in the U.S.-Soviet military equation. While short-term profits may be realized," Roth warned, "playing the role of technological enabler to the Soviets is not in the long-term interest of the United States."

Roth also stressed that the U.S. is in no position to criticize its allies, when it is considering making major changes in its trade policy to permit expanded East-West trade. "Can the United States really be taken seriously by our CoCom partners," he asked, "when we threaten sanctions against countries that don't safeguard their technology from the Soviet bloc, while at the same time we rush to sign billion-dollar trade deals with the Soviet Union? We cannot have it both ways."

Foreign aid cuts 'pose security risks'

The austerity mania which has seized Congress spells disaster for 30 developing-sector nations, which will lose all American military assistance as a result of the cutbacks mandated in the FY1988 omnibus reconciliation bill.

The State Department released the grim details on Jan. 29. In addition to the 30 nations which will be cut off, it revealed that nearly every other country receiving U.S. security aid will suffer immense cutbacks, ranging from 52% to 99%.

"The low overall levels and the extent of the earmarks pose serious security risks," said State Department spokesman Charles Redman. The low numbers "will undermine U.S. objectives." The understatement is understandable. As an official of the State

Department, which has been in the forefront of the campaign to abandon U.S. allies, his hand-wringing is not too believable.

The cutbacks have already caused deep strains: Portugal, whose aid commitment will be reduced by \$30 million, has informed Washington that the strategic U.S. air base in the Azores is in jeopardy. The government of Prime Minister Anibal Cavaco Silva has decided to demand that Washington give it a guarantee of increased and sustained payments for continued use of the base. Under a 1983 defense agreement between the two countries, the United States promised to regularly increase aid to Portugal in return for use of the base.

The aid reductions are hitting the developing sector most severely. Washington will end military aid to all Ibero-America, with the exception of three Central American countries. In addition, 19 countries will lose all economic security funding aid, among them, Haiti, Peru, Lebanon, Zaire, and Nigeria.

Senator wants Medicare to pay for mammograms

Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) has introduced legislation to make Medicare, the government health program for those over 65, pay for routine mammograms, the principal tool for diagnosing breast cancer.

At present, Medicare will not pay for the procedure, unless it is used to diagnose a growth which is already large enough to have been detected by other means, in which case, if it is malignant, it will almost certainly have spread.

Medicare's policy is stupid and shortsighted. A mammogram costs

approximately \$100-200—certainly not expensive by today's standards of medical care, but often beyond the means of an elderly widow eking out an existence on Social Security.

Yet, breast cancer takes its greatest toll on older women. Of the 40,000 women who died of breast cancer last year, 28,000 were over 65. Of the approximately 130,000 cases of breast cancer reported in 1987, half were in women over 65. At the end of January, the National Cancer Institute released statistics showing that the rate of breast cancer in American women is skyrocketing.

It is estimated that it would cost Medicare \$150 million a year to cover the cost of annual screenings, a minuscule figure compared to the cost of treating more advanced breast cancer.

The benefits of making mammograms more broadly available were made clear at hearings on Mikulski's bill held by the Senate Labor and Human Services Committee Jan. 28. Dr. Charles R. Smart, chief of the early detection branch of the National Cancer Institute, testified: "If modern mammography were applied broadly in the United States to the population of women over 40, there is good reason to believe that mortality from breast cancer would decrease by 30-40%, and where applied to older age groups, the benefits would be even greater."

Why has Medicare refused to change its policy, when all the evidence indicates that thousands of lives, and millions of dollars, could be saved? Primarily because the system, under pressure from the budget-bashers, has adopted the idea that the population it's supposed to be serving, is "too old" and "unproductive," and that saving money, not lives, is its principal mission.