

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Senate votes military new anti-drug role

On Friday, May 13, the Senate voted overwhelmingly to give the military a major new role in stopping the flow of illegal drugs across U.S. borders. The Senate voted 83 to 6 in favor of a wide-ranging plan which would give the military a greater jurisdiction in detecting and tracking drug smugglers, and would allow the use of military personnel and equipment to intercept them.

The bill would also give the Navy limited powers of arrest on the high seas. Only those Navy personnel, however, who have received "appropriate training" and specific authorization from the Coast Guard could make arrests. No arrests could be made on U.S. land or waters.

The plan would also expand the use of the National Guard in interdiction and enforcement efforts, earmarking up to \$30 million to help support the endeavor.

The Senate vote virtually assures congressional action to designate a greater role to the military in the war on drugs as part of the \$300 billion defense authorization bill for next year. The House approved an even stronger measure earlier in the week, in which the President was authorized to deploy the armed forces to "locate, pursue, and seize" aircraft and ships carrying drugs and to arrest their crews.

The President has indicated that he could agree to the Senate plan and, according to Capitol Hill sources, has pressured the Pentagon to cooperate in drafting a plan which it could go along with.

The Pentagon has been skeptical, since this increased role in the war on drugs would take them away from their primary, constitutionally designated

task of defending the nation. In a period of austerity budgets, without sufficient additional funding, it would spell disaster for other important Pentagon programs. Pentagon officials have said that the effort could cost \$2 billion.

### Death-penalty proposal delays defense bill

One particular item of dispute which, at the time of this writing, is holding up the Defense Authorization Act, is an amendment by Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), who wants to make it a federal crime subject to the death penalty for anyone to kill or "participate substantially" in the killing of another person in connection with a drug transaction or conspiracy. Currently the death penalty can be imposed for drug-related killings only in states that have laws allowing capital punishment.

The amendment is hotly contested by senators opposed to capital punishment. There have been threats by the opponents of the bill that they would filibuster in order to delay its passage. The Senate refused 68 to 27, to table the amendment.

The amendment has been causing some problems for those interested in getting through the INF ratification process quickly. A prolonged debate on the capital-punishment issue could seriously delay the passing of the defense bill, or even jeopardize it entirely, and could delay debate on the INF treaty. Attempts have been made to get D'Amato to withdraw his amendment and reintroduce it at another time in the interest of getting swift action on the defense bill.

While 37 states have laws imposing the death penalty for specified crimes, the only such federal laws are two narrowly defined statutes passed in 1973 and 1985. The 1973 law is confined to air piracy and the 1985 law to espionage by military personnel in peacetime. Neither law has been constitutionally tested.

At the time of this writing, D'Amato has not agreed to withdraw the amendment, so the issue remains on the floor. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), a supporter of the bill, called drug traffickers "scumbags who exploit the weakest in our society" and said that "capital punishment is our society's recognition of the sanctity of human life." Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) opposes D'Amato's proposal for a number of reasons, "not the least of which is, you can't correct your mistakes."

### Senate seeks more harassment of Noriega

The Senate has passed a Sense of Congress resolution introduced by Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kans.), stating that the drug indictments against Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega should not be dropped. This occurred as the media reports that the White House, foiled in its attempts to oust the popular general, is allegedly trying to strike a deal with him.

Senator Dole waxed quite eloquent in his attacks against Noriega, saying, "If we let Noriega off the hook on the drug indictments that have been brought against him—no matter what the motive—we have sent a very regrettable message to the world." As was indicated in the May 17 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, the indict-

ments against Noriega were launched under the oversight of former Assistant Attorney General William Weld. Weld was also the key person in the Justice Department who launched the trumped-up charges against Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche.

## Senate leaders on guard against START surprises

Although the INF treaty has not yet been ratified, the subject of a future START treaty is now being mooted. Senate Majority Leader Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) and Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kans.) have introduced an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill calling for the presentation of a comprehensive presidential report on the implications such an accord would have for the future strategic force postures of the United States in the 1990s, *before* the signing of any START treaty.

The amendment is intended as a defensive maneuver to establish some congressional oversight of an eventual treaty. As Senator Byrd indicated in his remarks on presenting this amendment, "Arms control is wise, but only wise if it enhances our national security and that of our allies. . . . The architecture of our future national security posture must be developed to the satisfaction of not only the administration, but also the Congress, and in particular, the Senate, which has the role under the Constitution of giving its advice and consent to treaties. It would be the height of folly to rush into a START agreement without the precise development of this architecture."

Senator Byrd has been a key figure in demanding critical examination of the INF treaty, leading to the latest last-minute negotiations between Shultz and Shevardnadze in Geneva. Byrd is under heavy pressure to hasten Senate ratification of the treaty in time for the upcoming summit. Hopefully, he will heed his own words concerning the "height of folly" of rushed treaties and see to it that the INF is examined thoroughly, taking all the time necessary to do that.

## Demand probe of Wright's finances

House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.) could be in hot water if the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct decides to launch an ethics inquiry called for on May 18 by Common Cause, a citizens' lobbying group based in Washington. The president of Common Cause, Fred Wertheimer, in a letter to the chairman of the committee, urged an inquiry into the financial arrangements surrounding the publication of a book by Wright, and reports that the Speaker had intervened with federal bank regulators on behalf of Texas savings and loan operators.

Wright has often been accused of improprieties by Republican opponents, and is noted for his high-handed methods of manipulating voting in the House. At one point, Wright was given the epithet "Mussolini of the House" by Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) because of his tactics.

Gingrich has for months said that he would formally request that the ethics panel investigate Wright, and is "working with lawyers to develop formal charges." Under House rules, any

member can request an ethics probe of another member. If Gingrich does make such a request, it would be up to the committee to decide whether to conduct such an inquiry. Wright's office called the Common Cause request just another attempt to "blacken his [Wright's] name."

## Euthanasia scored in Senate hearings

Testimony by a representative of the National Democratic Policy Committee to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services centered on a strong condemnation of euthanasia, as well as the general health care policies imposed by the international insurance/reinsurance cartel with the help of such politicians as Sen. Ted Kennedy.

Specifically denounced were the Prospective Payment System and Diagnostic Related Groups, which delimit health care and increase the death rates among patients.

NDPC witness Webster Tarpley confronted Sen. Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.) with a report by the congressional Office of Technology Assessment which comes out clearly in favor of euthanasia (i.e., patient murder) as a "cost-cutting" measure. The report states, "The fact that a reliable life-saving treatment exists does not mean that a person who will die without it, has a right to receive it."

Tarpley called on the Senate to save money by cutting all funding for "cost-containment research" in the federal health care budget, and also to force insurance companies to open their books on medical insurance and physician liability policies.