

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Space advocates worry over NASA cuts

Rep. Robert Roe (D-N.J.), the chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, announced on June 29 that he has requested the General Accounting Office to do an audit of Space Station Freedom to determine "the impact that budgetary shortfalls are having on the program."

Due by Dec. 31, Rep. Roe requested that the audit provide an inventory of annual shortfalls in the budget and the programmatic changes that have occurred since the program began in 1985.

The ranking Republican on the committee, Rep. Robert Walker (Pa.), also expressed concern over the budget cuts, especially the virtual elimination of any increase in the Moon-Mars program. On June 28, Walker had submitted an amendment that sought to permit NASA to transfer up to \$266.9 million from any of its programs to be used to fund the Space Exploration Initiative. A point of order on the grounds that it provided for an unauthorized transfer of funds between NASA appropriations was sustained, effectively killing the amendment. Walker, noting that the Moon-Mars program is the first time that a specific goal has been given NASA in 20 years, warned that "a nation that fails to look forward, fails to show vision, is in fact a nation that is in descendency, rather than ascendancy." Walker alluded to public opinion which showed that 87% of Americans believe that the space program is something vitally important to them and something which keeps America competitive.

NASA Administrator Adm. Richard Truly commented on July 3 that the problems NASA has had recently with grounded shuttles and telescopes that need fixing would only be aggra-

vated by the \$800 million cut in the FY 91 NASA budget by Congress.

Liberal Democrats, however, are using the recent technical problems in the telescope and the space shuttle to scrap some of the more significant programs. Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee handling the space program, wants further cuts. Mikulski complained to the June 30 *Washington Post* that "they [NASA] had 10 years to put this together. They spent 2.8 billion dollars to be able to get it right." Mikulski said that the problem with the Hubble telescope "has called into question future NASA programs, such as other planned Great Observatories and a mission to Mars." "Are we going to keep ending up with techno-turkeys?" she ranted.

### Seniors: no cuts in Social Security

Senior-citizen groups are revving up to block any attempts to cut Social Security benefits as part of a deal in the ongoing budget summit talks between the White House and the Congress.

Benefit cuts were on the bargaining table last week when talks were recessed for the July 4th holiday. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the largest senior-citizen group in the country, is planning letter-writing campaigns and demonstrations.

Yet, because of the political sensitivity of the issue, it is doubtful if the budget summitters will target cuts in Social Security for their austerity package. "There is a lot of aim-taking," said John Rother, lobbyist for the AARP, "but the question is whether anyone is going to pull the trigger."

Most Democrats are wary of even discussing the issue. "The two things

the voters still give us credit for," said Harrison Hickman, a Democratic pollster, "is standing up for the middle class and protecting Social Security. . . . This is the time we can really communicate that we will uphold our promises. Just because the president breaks his doesn't mean we have to break ours."

There is less hesitation, however, among some on Capitol Hill who are calling for "equality of sacrifice." "Entitlements are going to have to take a pretty good shot if you're going to reach \$50 billion (the target set for the 1991 deficit reduction)," said Rep. Bill Frenzel (R-Minn.), the ranking GOP-er on the House Budget Committee. "And you can't hurt one crew and leave others untouched."

### Congress to halt aid cuts to pregnant women

The House on June 28 approved a measure which would prevent 250,000 pregnant women from being cut from the Special Supplemental Feeding Program.

The bill would increase the amount that states, which administer the nutrition program, can borrow against next year's allocation, and thus would enable the program to continue into the next fiscal year.

The \$2.1 billion program was about to run out of money due to higher food and formula prices.

### White House threatens veto on housing measure

Abandoning the conciliatory tone it had adopted in the discussions with the Senate on the omnibus housing legislation, the White House is now warning that it will veto the legislation

if passed by Congress.

In a terse five-page statement sent on July 10 from the Office of Management and Budget to the House Rules Committee, the administration criticized the bill as being too expensive, and claimed that it was not targeted to aid the poor. Sponsored by House Banking Committee Chairman Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.), the White House is concerned that the bill would exceed the administration's fiscal 1991 budget for the Housing and Urban Development and Agriculture departments' housing programs by \$6 billion, and that it relied too heavily on funding new construction as a way to increase the low- to moderate-income housing supply.

HUD Secretary Jack Kemp has said that such programs benefit developers at the expense of the truly needy. The White House is demanding that two elements of the Gonzalez bill—a rental production and a housing partnership program—be subject to “major revision or elimination.”

## **GOP dogged by Bush's lips**

As election campaigning gains momentum, Republican candidates are having a difficult time in shaking off the President's reversal of his “no new tax” pledge.

Rep. Lynn Martin (R-Ill.), who is challenging incumbent Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) for his Senate seat, said that the Bush statements were “not the kind of help I wanted.”

Rep. Robert C. Smith (R-N.H.), considered the front-runner to capture the Senate seat now held by Sen. Gordon Humphrey (R-N.H.), is concerned about the public's “cynicism about politicians breaking promises.” His colleague, Rep. Chuck Douglas

(R-N.H.), considers the Bush reversal “a dumb move all the way around.” Douglas feels that Bush will run into opposition in the 1992 New Hampshire primary unless he reverses course again and blocks any tax increase.

Sen. Humphrey, who is leaving the Senate to run for the New Hampshire State Senate has characterized Bush's flip-flop as a “major disaster on a national scale.” The plummeting economy will be blamed on the incumbent Republican administration, and the loss of the tax issue will put GOP candidates in a precarious position this fall.

## **Metzenbaum targets S&L chief**

Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Antitrust, Monopolies, and Business Rights, announced July 9 that he will subpoena a lobbyist with strong Republican Party ties who helped an Arizona insurance executive, James M. Fail, secure \$1.8 billion in federal assistance to acquire 15 insolvent Texas thrifts in 1988.

In an issue laden with political overtones, Metzenbaum said his subcommittee would focus on the role of the lobbyist. “Thompson's name is obviously front and center,” he said.

According to a document released by the subcommittee on July 9, Thompson failed to pay any interest or principal on a \$150,000 loan that had been guaranteed by Fail's insurance company. Thompson is a former congressional aide to then-Vice President George Bush. Now a Washington lobbyist, Thompson helped Fail, who has a history of legal and regulatory problems, to quickly win approv-

al for the takeover of the failed thrifts and for \$1.86 billion in federal aid from the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in 1988.

## **Armed Services panel split on Soviet threat**

A House Armed Services Committee panel has issued a sharply divided report on the conclusions of its study of the implications of Soviet military reforms for the U.S. defense budget.

The majority, led by Committee Chairman Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), echoed the analysis of CIA chief William Webster in asserting that the Soviet threat “is becoming an empty threat,” which, because of domestic turmoil, “cannot be revived.” The report asserts that “large-scale Soviet military interventions outside of Soviet territory seem beyond the Red Army's powers.”

Republicans rejected the conclusions, saying, “We believe the overconfident tone of this report is unjustified” and helps “to create the illusion that the U.S. can rapidly diminish its own capabilities.”

The report, entitled “The Fading Threat: Soviet Conventional Military Power in Decline,” was rebuked by Rep. William Dickinson (R-Ala.) who said, “Endorsing this report is tantamount to believing that the Soviet Union is already militarily impotent and not a global power to be reckoned with.”

Despite such opposition, the change in military policy is further demonstrated by the report that a draft version of the NATO communiqué proposed that “We will examine the possibility of the extension of arms-control measures to naval forces”—a measure which would signal the end of U.S. strategic presence in the European theater.