

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Bill would strip aid to African Horn nations

Rep. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) plans to introduce a bill which would strip aid to the governments of the countries in the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia.

He claims that "foreign aid, both bilateral, and multilateral, in the seventies and eighties, has exacerbated the conflicts and suffering in these countries," and has propped up military regimes. The proposal would effectively transfer aid which previously had gone to the governments of these hunger-stricken and devastated countries to non-governmental organizations. These groups would then decide how and whether it should be allocated.

The measure would deprive these governments of financial assistance, leading to greater instability and political chaos in these countries, and it would prohibit any military assistance.

The bill is viewed by many as an attack on the national sovereignty of the nations in the Horn of Africa, using food aid as a weapon to bludgeon them into submission to U.S. policy dictates.

AIPAC role key in war resolutions

The *Wall Street Journal* of Jan. 28 noted the key role of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in lobbying to push the United States into war.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported how Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), a Mormon, recently startled a reporter from *Washington Jewish Week* "when he unbuttoned his shirt to display a silver mezzuzah, locket-like amulet

with a Hebrew prayer inside."

The unusual alliances of Western and Southern politicians who voted for the war is in part due to AIPAC money, as well as the esoteric beliefs of many lawmakers. Although AIPAC played a "low-key role," with even pro-Israel hardliners divided on the war, AIPAC was key in delivering Democratic votes for the White House.

Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), for example, received \$155,590 from AIPAC during his 1986 campaign, and the rest of the Nevada delegation, which voted *en bloc* for war, is similarly beholden to AIPAC for funding.

Southern Democrats have also been heavily funded by AIPAC: Sen. Howell Heflin (D-Ala.) got \$87,000 plus from AIPAC-linked action committees, and Sen. Richard Shelby (D-Ala.) owes his victory over Jeremiah Denton to AIPAC funding.

Specter proposes cuts in energy use

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), one of the thugs of the Bush war party, has reacted to the war-imposed "oil crisis" by calling for cuts in energy consumption.

On Jan. 31, Specter introduced the Energy Conservation Act, which calls for the introduction of energy-saving measures in the federal government. Within one year of enactment, each federal agency must submit an energy conservation plan that carries a payback within 10 years or less. Each plan must include an energy use baseline for all of the agency's operations.

One provision of the Specter proposal draws upon the Global Warming Bill introduced by conservationist Sen. Timothy Wirth (D-Colo.) in July

of last year. This requires that state-regulated utilities reflect investments in energy conservation that are as profitable as costs associated with the construction of new facilities.

The bill also includes measures to require the establishment of "home energy rating systems," and would place restrictions on utilities, demanding that agencies like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) also adopt a least-cost plan. The proposal would restrict the Western Area Power Administration from selling power to any purchaser that does not have a least-cost plan.

The bill also targets the transportation industry by requiring auto manufacturers to take less fuel-efficient older cars out of service and replace them with new, more fuel-efficient ones.

Pentagon scored for press restrictions

Rep. Wayne Owens (D-Utah) criticized the restrictions placed on press coverage of the Gulf war by the Pentagon, in floor comments on Jan. 29. He noted that the restrictions go far beyond anything which was imposed during the Vietnam war.

"I am alarmed," said Owens, "rather, by additional rules that extend beyond the security requirements of the war effort, rules that enable the government to spin the news, to create false impressions, to distort the truth, and prejudice the judgment of an informed public.

"In Operation Desert Storm," Owens continued, "I speak specifically of the restrictive manner in which press pools are operated, prohibitions on independent reporting, the constant presence of government officials at every interview in the field, and the

suppression of information for political benefit. . . . The guidelines in force for Operation Desert Storm were crafted in the aftermath of the Vietnam war, and are apparently designed to sanitize the news and shape the reactions of the American people to make us believe that the war effort is going better than perhaps it is, to assure us that government officials are running things better than perhaps they are, to convince us that the war is more painless and bloodless than perhaps it is."

Owens noted that it is not only the U.S. public, but also the U.S. forces in the Gulf which are being subjected to restrictions on the information they are allowed to receive. "American soldiers in Saudi Arabia complain," said Owens, "that news programming on Armed Forces Radio has been curtailed, and this, according to one Army captain, 'makes you start to wonder what they are keeping from us.'"

Hollings attacks debt service cost

Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) lambasted President Bush's State of the Union message, noting that he "saw ringing phrases like 'shining purpose' and a 'thousand points of light,' but that the President did not once utter the word 'deficit.'"

"He is living in a dream world. But meanwhile, back here in the real world, we are looking at a record \$360 billion deficit for 1991, according to the Congressional Budget Office's latest estimate," he said.

Hollings reemphasized a key, but not often considered, factor in the U.S. deficit: interest on the U.S. debt. "We will pony up," said Hollings, "more than \$290 billion in interest on

the debt in fiscal year 1991 alone. That is nearly as big as the entire defense budget. What is worse, thanks to runaway deficits, interest on the debt is escalating in increments of nearly \$30 billion per year. This year, some 60¢ out of every \$1 in personal income taxes will go strictly to pay for interest on the national debt; 60¢ out of every \$1 will purchase not so much as a paper clip for the American people."

The only proposal which Hollings suggests to the deficit problem, is to raise taxes. Never once has he mentioned the possibility of a debt moratorium.

Immigrants enticed to fight in Gulf

As the fighting starts to heat up in the Gulf and with a U.S. contingent already composed largely of non-whites, the Senate, under the guise of assisting immigration to the United States, passed a bill which creates a special immigrant status for aliens who have served honorably (or are enlisted to serve) in the Armed Forces of the United States for at least 12 years.

The bill is said to only affect Filipino servicemen with the U.S. Navy. But it has the appearance of trying to create a mercenary army composed of impoverished Third World citizens to be utilized in the bloody wars of the Bush New World Order against Third World nations.

Roybal warns against cuts in Medicare

Rep. Edward Roybal (D-Calif.), chairman of the Select Committee on Aging, warned of the negative impact of the Bush administration's move to

undermine the social insurance nature of the Medicare program.

A new premium for Medicare being proposed for some beneficiaries would require higher-income beneficiaries to pay 75% rather than 25% of program costs. "The administration's attempt to disable the Medicare program and erode its popular support without attempting to address the real issues of rapidly rising health care costs and the need for comprehensive health care reform is unconscionable," said Roybal in a press release issued on Feb. 5.

Roybal also criticized the administration's proposal of a 20% co-insurance for clinical laboratories. "This would cost the beneficiaries over \$4 billion in out-of-pocket expenses over five year," Roybal commented. He noted that "in terms of total income, health and long-term care costs are 'emptying the elderly's pocketbooks.'"

Non-proliferation act aims at European firms

A bill introduced in the Senate on Jan. 31 by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) would penalize firms which have sold arms to countries on the U.S. blacklist.

The proposal would target nations which "threaten to attack other states, or to use weapons of mass destruction against them," and would penalize any nations that transfer "military and/or arms technology and equipment" that may be used to "manufacture and deliver arms or weapons of mass destruction."

Because of the broad nature of the specifications, this bill would help "discipline" nations not in sync with Bush's New World Order.