

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Brady pleads for IMF quota increase

In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 5, Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady pleaded with Congress to authorize a \$12 billion quota increase for the International Monetary Fund. Citing the "successful" work of the IMF in Latin America and stressing the role the Fund intends to play in eastern Europe, Brady warned that a failure to pass the increase could throw a monkey-wrench into IMF efforts to impose its austerity conditionalities on the newly liberated countries of the former Soviet Union.

"The consequences of failure to pass the IMF quota increase legislation would be extremely adverse," said Brady. "Without our support, the IMF quota increase cannot go into effect. This will threaten the West's entire response to the new states of the former Soviet Union, and seriously erode U.S. leadership in the IMF at a critical turning point in history."

If the increase is not approved, and opposition to it is strong, Brady warned that the Japanese and others could renege on their pledges to the Fund.

Dem leadership would scrap budget agreement

The House Democratic leadership is supporting a bill introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) which would alter last year's "budget pact" between the White House and Congress. Last year's agreement divided the budget into three major areas, domestic, international, and defense, and stipulated that new outlays in one area must be compensated by cuts within the same area. The Conyers amendment would break down that "firewall" to allow defense savings to be spent on domes-

tic social programs.

The Democratic budget would reduce defense spending authority by about \$15 billion, roughly twice that recommended by President Bush. House Democratic leaders are supporting the plan as are key committee chairmen including Ways and Means Committee chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), Appropriations Committee chairman Jamie Whitten (D-Miss.), Energy and Commerce Committee chairman John Dingell (D-Mich.), and Transportation Committee chairman Robert Roe (D-N.J.).

The plan has met with stiff opposition from Republicans and conservative Democrats, however, who want to use the "savings" in defense for reducing the overall deficit.

After rejecting the Bush budget proposal by a 370-42 vote, as well as a budget proposal presented by the Congressional Black Caucus, Congress passed a budget of \$1.5 trillion on March 5. The Democratic budget resolution contains two budget options, depending on whether the Conyers amendment passes.

Senate Republicans move for tougher crime bill

Desperate for election campaign issues, Senate Republicans have introduced a crime bill even more grisly than the one narrowly defeated last year.

The proposal incorporates most of the more barbaric aspects of last year's bill, but dropped the five-day waiting period for handgun purchases opposed by most Republicans. A threatened filibuster over this issue stopped passage of the previous bill.

The new crime proposals also authorize the death penalty for felony murders in the District of Columbia. The Republicans are using the shooting of House Sergeant-at-Arms Jack

Russ in the District as the pretext for ramrodding through this legislation.

District police, however, faced with numerous peculiarities in the Russ shooting, are beginning to question whether it was the result of a robbery at all. Russ was implicated in the investigation of financial improprieties at the House Post Office, whose operations Russ was partly responsible for.

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) called the Republican moves "election year, high-profile posturing."

Space station targeted by Dems

In a press conference on Feb. 27, a week after the Bush administration forced the resignation of NASA Administrator Richard Truly, Rep. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), the chairman of the House Budget Committee Task Force on Space, and Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) announced that they would move to eliminate funding for the space station. The move is an attack on manned space programs.

Durbin said that he was joining with Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) in reevaluating the funding for the space station. The aim would be to reduce the NASA budget by \$13 billion. There are "more projects [in the budget] than we can afford," said Durbin, who claimed that there was "no scientific research project on the drawing board that cannot be done by unmanned space vehicles."

Contradicting testimony by representatives of the National Institutes of Health before congressional committees earlier this year where they underscored the importance of space medicine, Durbin claimed that the NIH would rather have the funds for their own research than give them to NASA.

Durbin cited a General Accounting Office report which questioned the funding needs of the space station. Sen. Jake Garn (R-Utah), one of the few members of Congress to have flown on the Space Shuttle, said in floor statements on Feb. 27 that he considered it ridiculous for the GAO to try to predict how the future budgets will look, "since indeed, it is the Congress, through our own actions, which will determine the future for NASA programs and our nation."

Finance Committee okays tax cut, veto threatened

The Senate Finance Committee approved on March 3 a Democratic tax package that includes a \$300 tax credit for the children of middle-class families and a tax increase for the upper tax brackets. The bill was approved by an 11-9 vote along strict party lines.

The legislation, crafted by Finance Committee Chairman Lloyd Bentsen (D-Tex.), is a variation of the seven-point package presented by President George Bush in his State of the Union message in January, but included the middle-class tax cut and a smaller capital gains tax reduction than that proposed by the President.

The bill is facing a certain veto by President Bush, but will serve Democrats in their attempts to profile themselves as being for "tax fairness"—their own election issue.

Lieberman calls for holy war against Saddam

In a significant escalation of the "war of words" in the U.S. Senate, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), one of the more pro-Bush Democrats during Operation Desert Storm, celebrated

the anniversary of the war by lashing out against Iraq, vowing no let-up until Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is overthrown.

Making an outlandish comparison between the Iraqi turkey shoot and the U.S. Civil War, and blasphemously quoting Abraham Lincoln, Lieberman demanded that there be "no easing of sanctions while Saddam rules." He also called for increased support to the Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni opponents of Saddam, recognition of "a provisional government comprised of Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis," and "protecting that government's existence in areas of Iraq outside of Saddam's control."

Lieberman also proposed American surveillance flights over Iraq, supplemented by flights of combat aircraft, "a reminder that we mean business." "Normal practices of diplomacy," said Lieberman, should not be applied when dealing with "international outlaws."

Gonzalez questions Gates's veracity

As part of his continuing investigation of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, House Banking Committee Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) presented more information in floor comments on March 9 that CIA head Robert Gates may not have been candid about continued intelligence-sharing with Iraq after the Iran-Iraq War.

Information received by the Banking Committee shows that the intelligence-sharing agreements with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War continued until May 1990, a fact which contradicts statements by Gates to the Senate Intelligence Committee in October 1991 where he stated that the arrangements had been terminated in 1988.

Gonzalez is also questioning

whether procedures were followed by the intelligence agencies in informing congressional committees responsible for intelligence oversight. "The revelation that intelligence sharing with Iraq continued well into 1990 also raises new questions about the administration's reporting to the Senate and House intelligence committees," said Gonzalez. "Based on the fact that the Senate Committee report on the Gates nomination contains a misleading date for the end of the intelligence-sharing arrangement, I wonder if they were properly informed."

Gonzalez recommended that these issues be addressed in public oversight hearings.

Freshman GOPers want House bank scandal names

House Republican freshmen are taking the lead in demanding full exposure of those congressmen who ran overdrafts on their accounts at the House Post Office. The scandal surfaced when Democrats proceeded with an investigation of the "October Surprise."

About 20,000 bad checks have been written at the House Post Office, but no action has been taken against the offending congressmen. The only consideration taken by Post Office managers was that overall monthly deposits covered overall monthly withdrawals. The practice has been followed since 1832.

Republicans believe that in the present atmosphere of supposedly strict "ethical propriety," the scandal could hit Democrats in the upcoming congressional elections. Rep. John Kyl (R-Ariz.) said that more than 50 members had been overdrawn by more than one month's pay at least once, and "scores" had written more than 100 bad checks.