

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

NAFTA faces defeat as Democrats split

A division in Democratic ranks looks as if it might lead to the defeat of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in Congress. Some members of the Democratic congressional leadership, including House Democratic Whip David Bonior (Mich.) and House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (Mo.), have been highly critical of the treaty. Bonior has pledged to use his office to actively oppose it.

House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.) has not declared an official leadership position on the issue, despite the White House's intent to try to push the treaty through. An informal agreement has been worked out to allow both sides access to the resources of various leadership offices in an attempt to minimize bitterness during the fight.

The support of Republican legislators, who are generally favorable to this "free trade" agreement, is crucial for passage. But the agreement will only benefit international banks and financiers, and GOPers are feeling the heat. "I am very, very shaken by the intensity of my colleagues' sense of being beleaguered on this issue during the recess," House Minority Whip Newt Gingrich (Ga.) told the Sept. 10 *Washington Post*. "We are 40 votes weaker than I thought when I got to town on Monday." Rep. John Kasich (Ohio), the ranking Republican on the Budget Committee, admits that he has gone from being a supporter of the treaty to undecided, because of concerns expressed by "vulnerable workers" who met him during the August recess.

A vote on NAFTA will have to come before the Dec. 31 deadline for the "fast track" authority, which mandates a simple up or down vote on the trade pact without amendments. NAFTA may make it through the Sen-

ate, but will have rough going in the House. President Clinton has appointed William Daley, son of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, to manage the NAFTA campaign for the White House.

Resistance to Somalia operation growing

The Senate passed a "sense of Congress" resolution by a 90-7 vote on Sept. 9, which calls on President Clinton to seek congressional authorization by Nov. 15 for further deployment of U.S. forces in Somalia.

Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), a harsh critic of U.S. military action in Somalia, forced the issue, to the chagrin of Democratic leaders, when he proposed an amendment on Sept. 8 which would place a 30-day limit on operations in Somalia. After that time, according to the Byrd proposal, the President would have to conduct a review of the effect of U.N. actions in Somalia and submit a report to Congress before any further actions could be taken.

The Byrd proposal forced the Democratic leadership to come up with an alternative which would not lead to a cessation of U.S. operations in Somalia.

Byrd is not alone in his opposition to the Somalia operations. Many senators on both sides of the aisle have questioned the wisdom of a continued U.S. military presence in Somalia. Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) was particularly concerned about how the administration has spent so much effort in Somalia, while letting the Bosnians undergo a genocidal war. "In contrast to Somalia," said Dole, "what is at stake in Bosnia is more than just Bosnia — it is the future of the international order. And one has to wonder how we can support

nation-building in Somalia, while, at the same time, we sit quietly by and watch the wholesale destruction of Bosnia and her people."

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) is skeptical of further military action unless the goals of U.N. policy in the area are more clearly delineated. Nunn said on Sept. 8 that he didn't want "to set up a situation where the United States has committed its military to a mission that is very broad and basically has no end point and really no definition."

Gore 'reform' plan rankles Congress

Concern is growing on Capitol Hill that the proposals of the task force on governmental reform, known as "re-inventing government," led by Vice President Al Gore and presented on Sept. 8, strike at the prerogatives of Congress to the advantage of the Executive branch.

Key congressional members have complained that they weren't consulted on the program, officially known as the National Performance Review. Neither Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, nor William Clay (D-Mo.), chairman of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee, which oversees government personnel, were aware of the content of the proposals until they were made public.

The Gore proposals would introduce sweeping changes into government procedure and, consequently, in the way Congress works. The plan calls for biennial budgeting and appropriations, elimination of numerous programs and regulations, and transfer of some responsibilities between Executive departments, possibly af-

fecting congressional committee jurisdictions. The measure includes a line-item veto for the President.

Much of what the Gore report considers "micro-managing" by the Congress is encompassed by the constitutional oversight functions of Congress. The Gore proposals would also eliminate various programs and offices, especially in the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development. It would transfer responsibility for overseeing food safety solely to the Food and Drug Administration, a proposal which has already sparked a jurisdictional dispute between the Agriculture and the Energy and Commerce committees.

Space Station must be American, says Mikulski

Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that funds NASA, expressed her skepticism over the agreement between the United States and Russia signed by Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Vice President Al Gore on Sept. 2, which seems to endorse a "unified Space Station" to be planned jointly by the two countries. Mikulski expressed her concerns on Sept. 8, as her subcommittee approved a \$14.6 billion 1994 budget for NASA which includes \$2.1 billion for the Space Station.

The last vote on the Space Station in the Senate was 40-33, a close margin which may have become smaller after the loss of the Mars Observer mission. A further change in the Space Station program which, for fiscal reasons, has been redesigned (and scaled down) several times, could lead to increasing doubt about the viability of the project. "We support a cooperative effort with Russia,"

said Mikulski, "but we believe the Space Station effort, if approved by Congress, must be an American Space Station."

Senate backs 'Don't ask' policy on gays

The Senate repelled on Sept. 9 an attempt by liberal Democrats to end all restrictions on service in the military by homosexuals. The amendment, offered by Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), would have removed the "don't ask, don't tell" compromise on gays in the military from the 1994 defense budget, and allowed the President more leeway in making it easier for openly homosexual men and women to join the service.

The White House, which accepted the "don't ask, don't tell" compromise because of opposition to homosexuals in the military from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed no interest in reviving this debate. Those who wanted to reinstate the practice of questioning recruits about their sexual orientation also opted for the compromise.

Elders confirmed after stormy debate

The Senate confirmed Dr. Joycelyn Elders on Sept. 8 as Surgeon General of the United States in a 65-34 vote. The Elders nomination was held up through the August recess because of controversial attacks she had made against the Catholic Church and Christian pro-life activists. On one occasion she had tried to justify her own pro-abortion stance by saying that abortion would lower the number of babies born with Down's syndrome, a statement which evoked parallels to Nazi eugenicists and provoked a firestorm of opposition.

Elders is a strong supporter of the controversial Norplant birth control program, and advocates sex education as early as kindergarten. Considerable opposition to Elders's nomination came from church groups and human rights organizations. Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), an opponent of the nomination, said that he thought President Clinton "will live to regret this nominee unless she makes substantial changes from her conduct of the past."

House deals blow to one-worldism

The House dealt a blow to "multilateralism" on Sept. 13, voting down a measure which would have created a special \$30 million fund for peacekeeping operations. The measure, tagged onto the defense budget bill, would pay for "startup costs" for five military operations short of all-out war.

"The administration is on the verge of moving U.S. foreign policy where the United Nations determines how and where operations [should be run] abroad," warned Rep. James Hansen (R-Utah). He called the fund a "blank check for unspecified peacekeeping operations around the world."

The House also rejected another "multinational" spending measure which would have authorized \$10 million for the Pentagon to build a command, control, and communications center at the United Nations in New York City. The measure would also have provided \$23.1 million for the training of foreign peacekeeping units in order to teach the military's role in a democracy. Rep. Robert Dornan (R-Calif.) lampooned the idea of building a "war room on the East River." The measure was defeated in a 210-199 vote.