

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### **B**rown threatens to cancel Space Station

Speaking at the annual Goddard Memorial Symposium of the American Astronautical Society on March 3, Rep. George Brown (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, shocked his audience by saying that if expected cuts in the FY 95 NASA budget are not reversed, he will recommend eliminating funding for the Space Station in order to maintain the overall health of the space program. The proposed \$250 million reduction from this year's budget by the White House, he stated, is "not due to a lack of money, but a lack of priority." While overall funding for federal R&D has been reduced in the President's budget, he said, "NASA has borne the brunt of the cutbacks."

I want to "shock you into a sense of urgency," Brown told aerospace industry and space science leaders. While NASA could "live" within the reduced budget the White House has submitted, he explained, this will lead to even greater cuts in the Appropriations Committee. "For years," he said, "the Appropriations Committee has used the NASA budget as a 'cash cow' for other Appropriations accounts. There is no signal that this will change in the current round of appropriations, and such actions will necessitate major restructuring of the NASA programs."

Brown mentioned that all of the amendments that have been introduced year after year on the House floor to eliminate the Space Station have come from members of the Appropriations Committee, some of whom see no need for a manned space program.

Knowing that the Space Station is the centerpiece of President Clinton's efforts to cooperate with the Russians, Brown is seeking leverage to get ac-

tion from the White House. According to *Space News*, Brown discussed this with Clinton aboard Air Force One on Feb. 6. Opposed to the idea that space programs should be used for foreign policy rather than science and technology purposes, Brown said, "We're doing everything wrong due to a lack of vision."

### **S**enate bill aims at stemming immigration

A bill designed to slow immigration into the United States and clamp down on "illegals" was introduced in the Senate on March 2. The bill, introduced by Minority Whip Alan Simpson (Wy.), the senior Republican on the immigration subcommittee, plays into the hysteria especially rampant in border states such as California, over an influx of immigrants burdening already strained state economies.

Simpson's bill is one of a number of proposals seeking to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. A Senate aide said that a commission on immigration reform set up by a 1990 law was due to make its first report in September and that legislation before then would be premature.

"After a decade of high immigration coupled with a tough recession and high unemployment, it is time to take a breather," Simpson said. His bill calls for a temporary reduction in the number of legal immigrants annually to the pre-1990 level of 500,000, down from 675,000 currently. It also calls for a secure means of identification for use by all persons when applying for a job or claiming welfare benefits. He said there would be safeguards to ensure that this did not become a "national ID card." The bill would also prevent legal aliens from obtaining any federal benefits except

emergency medical aid and disaster relief. It would provide for swifter deportation of criminal aliens, tighten up on asylum cases, and set a statutory limit of 80,000 on the number of refugees admitted annually.

### **H**ouse panel okays \$1.5 trillion spending plan

The House Budget Committee approved President Clinton's proposed \$1.5 trillion budget for FY 1995, which starts Oct. 1, by a vote of 25-17 on March 3, the first step on its road to approval by Congress. The vote was along party lines, and the Clinton proposal was left almost intact.

"This budget directs more federal government money toward investments, criminal justice, education and training, building infrastructure and conducting research—the basic thrust of the President's plan," committee Chairman Martin Olav Sabo (D-Minn.) said after the panel acted.

The budget resolution must be approved by both houses of Congress but needs no presidential signature. It projects roughly \$1.514 trillion in spending and \$1.338 trillion in revenue. Republicans offered an alternate plan, which the committee rejected in a party-line vote.

House leaders are rushing to get the budget to the floor before a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is considered on March 16 or 17, so they can highlight the difference between the balanced budget many members say they want and what they are actually willing to support. A balanced budget amendment was recently narrowly defeated in the Senate.

"I assume that people who are for a balanced budget amendment would also be for a budget path that leads us to that result," House Speaker Thom-

as Foley (D-Wash.) told reporters. Although many supporters of a balanced budget from both parties sit on the committee, no one proposed the deep cuts and tax increases necessary to achieve a balanced budget by 2001. Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.), a supporter of the balanced budget amendment, offered a proposal that would freeze cost-of-living increases for all government programs in 1996 and 1998 (including Social Security) and save \$67 billion over four years. It was rejected on a 32-8 vote.

## **Mitchell won't seek reelection to Senate**

U.S. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) shocked the Capitol on March 4, surprising his colleagues and staff with the announcement that he will leave Congress. "This is the right time for me to consider other challenges and to give someone else the chance to serve," Mitchell, 60, said in a statement prepared for broadcast on three Maine television stations. "I will not be a candidate for reelection."

Mitchell, who had been expected to win reelection easily, said he was "in good health and spirits," and that while people may search for other reasons for his departure, he claimed "there aren't any." On March 3 Mitchell had dinner with President Clinton at the White House, where he informed him of his decision.

Mitchell's decision could damage efforts to push through Clinton administration legislative proposals, especially on health care reform. It could also make it more difficult for Senate Democrats to fend off the hysteria being whipped up by Republicans around the alleged wrongdoing in the Whitewater affair.

Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) said he was "disheartened . . . and disappointed" by Mitchell's decision.

"It is about the worst news I can imagine for the Senate and for the nation," said Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.).

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) said he was "surprised and saddened" by the news.

## **Republicans sabotage new banking legislation**

In hearings on March 2-3, Senate Republicans railed against attempts by the Clinton administration to gain greater oversight over the operations of the Federal Reserve Bank. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), one of the most vociferous proponents of the Whitewater witchhunt against Clinton's presidency, warned that he would sabotage the legislation.

"Let me first serve notice: I would vigorously, vigorously oppose giving to the Justice Department this total authority," D'Amato warned. "There is just no way, absolutely no way that I would approve this. I just see this now: Here we are starting out with a fresh, new agency, a new system. We're going to ensure independence from political influence, and we should allow the agency to make its determination as when and how to bring suit."

Just two days prior, on March 1, D'Amato asked the Senate Banking Committee to investigate what he claimed was an improper meeting of high-level White House staff on the "Whitewater affair."

Republicans argue that any restrictions on the "independence" of the Fed would lead to government "manipulation." "But the issues that

we're facing today cast a pall over the idea of taking any power from an independent Federal Reserve and consolidating it under a new federal banking commission," wailed Sen. Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.). Clinton is "the President today; but the system we're talking about building would be controlled by whatever President of whatever ilk might get into the White House, and even have the ability to manipulate it into moving. And I think that is the worst possible situation that we could have happen and the most devastating thing we could do to fiscal integrity and responsibility in this country."

The administration would create a Federal Banking Commission, as a supervisory group of all the banking regulatory agencies, on whose board would sit the chairman of the Fed and the secretary of the treasury.

The Wall Street banking community is expending major effort to counter the administration proposal. Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan presented an alternative which would in fact enlarge the regulatory role of the Fed and prevent greater oversight into its operations. At hearings with Greenspan on March 3, Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.) noted that there was in fact a consensus among some of the major banks to support the Greenspan alternative in order to sabotage the administration's proposal. "In a closed meeting with the Federal Reserve's top officials," said Sarbanes, "dozens of the nation's most powerful bankers vowed to back the Fed in opposing the Clinton administration's plan for centralizing bank regulation. The chairmen of big banks in each of the Fed's 12 regional districts endorsed instead the Fed's plan to take over the bank supervision role of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., according to a copy of the meeting's official summary."