

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood and William Jones

Science committee girds against environmentalists

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner was put on the defensive by Democrats and Republicans in a House Science Committee hearing on Jan. 6. Committee members plan to change the procedures used by EPA to ban allegedly harmful substances.

James Hayes (D-La.) stated his intention to work with committee chairman Robert Walker (R-Pa.) to reform risk assessment. Bill Baker (R-Calif.) scored the EPA mandates that impose federal implementation plans regarding ground-level ozone and carbon dioxide emissions, which "exceed the legal jurisdiction of the EPA," and have no regard for the impact on the economy.

Republicans pursue constitutional changes

On Jan. 4, the House passed by a vote of 279-182 a rule requiring a three-fifths majority vote to pass any bill raising income tax rates. It would not apply to the Senate.

David Skaggs (D-Colo.) said the change abused Congress's constitutional privilege of making its own rules, in order "to subvert the majority rule that is central to the operation of the Legislative branch." Skaggs said that the simple majority required for passage of legislation was adopted by the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and defended by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison in the *Federalist Papers*, to overcome "the paralysis of national government caused by the super-majority requirement" under the Articles of Confederation.

Skaggs called the rule change "an act of high posturing. As much as the Republicans may wish to seem opposed to tax increases, it is unseemly

to do so at the expense of the Constitution." He warned of the danger of starting down this road, and cited a memo sent out two weeks earlier by Rules Committee Chairman Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.) calling for the super-majority concept to be applied to all votes on taxes and fees of any kind.

The House also voted to limit to six consecutive years the length of time anyone can serve as a committee chairman, and voted to cut committee staff by one-third. These measures, taken together, cut the political power of the Congress to accomplish substantial tasks, in line with the anti-government outlook of the Conservative Revolutionaries.

Dole would end arms embargo against Bosnia

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) introduced a bill on Jan. 4 to end U.S. participation in the United Nations arms embargo against Bosnia. Under the Dole measure, President Clinton would have to lift U.S. adherence to the embargo on May 1 or whenever Bosnia asks for help, whichever comes first.

State Department spokesman Michael McCurry called the move unfortunate and unwise.

Dole also introduced legislation to restrict U.S. military participation under the United Nations, and to restrict financing of U.N. military operations.

Balanced budget proposal on fast track in House

During a hearing in the House Judiciary subcommittee on the Constitution on Jan. 9, Chairman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) tried to rush the proceedings in order that the proposed balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitu-

tion can come to a floor vote on Jan. 19.

Opponents are trying to force GOPers to disclose what programs they intend to cut, and to discuss unfunded mandates. Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.) said, "I really wish we could spend the time talking about where we're going to cut," instead of giving Americans a false sense of security that a balanced budget amendment will solve the problem.

Joe Barton (R-Tex.), the chief sponsor of the proposed amendment, testified that a balanced budget amendment is necessary because the \$4.7 trillion debt "has been amassed by consistent overspending," and amending the Constitution will "give us the discipline to make the tough choices" as to what to cut.

In the Senate, the Judiciary Committee began consideration of a balanced budget amendment on Jan. 5.

Shelby would halt legal immigration

Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), who switched parties after the last election, introduced a bill on Jan. 5 that would impose a virtual moratorium on legal immigration to the United States. Shelby ignored various studies showing the economic benefits of such immigration.

Shelby claimed that "our capacity, as a country, to process and assimilate the heavy flow of immigrants is not sustainable" because of "excessive demands on social, medical, and welfare services." He complained that "legal immigration creates a demand more than three times greater than illegal immigration," estimated at about 300,000 per year, and that "states do not have the resources to provide services to an additional 1.3 million persons a year."

Shelby said that immigration is bad for the job market. There were 672,303 legal immigrants in 1992 between the ages of 20 and 64. He said that their entry into the job market "effectively reduces wages by increasing the labor supplied. At a time when real income is stagnant, if not declining, immigration policy should not contribute such a strong downward pressure on real income."

Shelby claimed his bill, the Immigration Moratorium Act of 1995, "would ease the demands on state governments while minimizing the negative economic consequences immigrants have on the labor force."

Gonzalez introduces bill to control derivatives

Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) introduced the "Derivatives Safety and Soundness Supervision Act of 1995" on Jan. 4, to bring financial derivatives under control. The need for this, he said in a press statement, "has been heightened due to such recent calamities as the Orange County [California] bankruptcy."

Gonzalez, who had introduced a similar bill in the last Congress, said it has been expanded to cover insurance firms, securities companies, and depository institutions in order to ensure that regulators are adequately addressing the risks posed by derivatives to the economy in general and to individual companies. Provisions include:

- requiring all federal banking agencies to work together to establish "standards relating to capital, accounting, disclosure, examinations, and suitability for financial institutions engaged in derivatives activities;

- requiring agencies to consider and, if appropriate, require additional quantitative and qualitative disclo-

tures on information relating to derivatives activities in call reports and annual reports;

- prohibiting financial institutions from engaging in derivatives activities unless conducted under a written management plan containing "prudential" standards approved by the board of directors.

Science committee members fight budget cuts

During the first hearing of the Science Committee on Jan. 6, both Democrats and Republicans made clear their intention to fight proposed cuts in science and technology programs. Committee Chairman Robert Walker (R-Pa.) castigated the government and private industry for "worrying about the current fiscal year without considering the effect of today's decisions on the future." After the hearing, Walker denied that the Contract with America enumerated cuts in science and technology programs, and said that he was made the vice chairman of the Budget Committee to safeguard these programs.

Dave Weldon (R-Fla.), whose district includes the Kennedy Space Center, said there should be no more cuts in the Space Shuttle program because there is a lot of fear that people will lose their jobs, and that was one reason why people sent him to Washington.

Van Hilleary (R-Tenn.), whose district includes the University of Tennessee Space Institute and the Air Force Arnold Engineering Center, queried NASA Administrator Dan Goldin on why money had not yet been allocated to build new wind tunnels. When he campaigned, he explained, scientists convinced him this was a good investment; now we must get on with the job.

Steve Stockman (R-Tex.), whose district includes the Johnson Space Center, complained to Goldin about the stretch-outs and redesigns of the space station. "I know, because my wife worked on the space station redesign," he stated. There is an estimate that 2,500 more jobs could be lost at NASA, and he wanted to know how many would be lost at JSC.

Freshman Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Tex.) said that when she campaigned in the inner-city churches in her district, all of the people expressed their "admiration of the Johnson Space Center and all it's done." How will NASA be able to accomplish all of the things it has set out to do, if it's budget keeps declining? she asked.

Dorgan attacks mantra of free trade

Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) told the Senate on Jan. 6 that, instead of encouraging companies to move their operations to cheap-labor markets overseas, "we ought to decide here and now that our jobs in this Congress are to find ways to nurture and protect and support and provide incentives for jobs here in the United States of America."

Dorgan pointed out that in the first nine months of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), "we lost 10,000 jobs," and that the recent peso devaluation "wiped out every single advantage we gained in tariffs" with Mexico. He complained that both Democratic and Republican administrations "stand around like the Hare Krishna chanting 'free trade, free trade, free trade.'"

Instead of offering a real alternative based on dirigistic economics, Dorgan touted "fair trade."