

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

D'Amato calls for trade boycott of Iran

Alleging that Iran has placed chemical weapons in the Strait of Hormuz, Anti-Defamation League-henchman Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), together with Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), introduced legislation on March 27 that would place sanctions on foreign companies that trade with Iran. The measure was immediately endorsed by the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) as part of its own "Plan of Action" against Iran.

According to the *Washington Post*, the legislation would "prohibit the U.S. government from doing business with any corporation anywhere that does business with Iran, ban any U.S. exports by or to such a company, and prohibit the importation into the United States of any goods produced by a company doing oil business with Iran or selling Iran goods with a potential military use." The United States is Iran's largest trading partner.

Earlier this year, D'Amato had introduced legislation calling for a total trade embargo between the United States and Iran. The new legislation is also intended to muscle foreign companies to impose an embargo on Iran or else suffer the risk of being blocked from trading with the United States.

"Simply put," said D'Amato in a statement put out by his office, "a foreign corporation or person will have to choose between trade with the United States or trade with Iran."

The measure is also meant to pressure the Clinton administration to take harsher measures against Iran. In mid-March, the administration put a stop to a major oil deal with Iran planned by Conoco. Later, it attempted to thwart a Russian deal with Iran around the development of nuclear energy. The moves against Iran are being

hailed by the U.S. supporters of the Israeli Likud party, such as Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy, who are intent on derailing the Middle East peace process.

Torricelli committee assignment threatened

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Larry Combest (R-Tex.) has threatened to throw Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.) off the committee for Torricelli's alleged public disclosures of CIA covert operations, saying that they violate a House secrecy oath and, possibly, the oath taken by members of the committee not to reveal information they learn from the committee.

The House "secrecy oath" was introduced in the 104th Congress under House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.). It bars legislators from revealing classified information.

Torricelli disclosed information about a paid CIA informant's involvement in two murders in Guatemala. He wrote a letter to President Clinton about the incident, and Clinton ordered a government-wide investigation into the matter. Torricelli also went public with the information at a press conference in the House Radio and Television Gallery on April 7. Torricelli said that he did not receive any of the information from intelligence panel briefings and therefore did not violate the oath he took as a committee member.

With regard to the newly instituted "secrecy oath," Torricelli said that there was a clear conflict between a House oath to protect classified data, and his oath of office to uphold the Constitution. Secrecy oaths were "not designed to shield unlawful behavior," he said.

As a result of Torricelli's disclosures, 12 senators, including Republican James Jeffords (Vt.), sent a letter to President Clinton asking him to move to secure and review for selective declassification "all U.S. government records pertaining to human rights cases in Guatemala."

Senate approves largest spending cuts in years

The Senate on April 6 unanimously passed the largest spending cuts in recent years. Although the legislation is indicative of the "slash and burn" mentality now prevalent on Capitol Hill, the bill is less destructive than its House counterpart.

A final compromise worked out between Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) restored \$834.7 million for education reform, the national service, drug-free schools, housing modernization, Head Start, Indian housing, and child nutrition programs. The Senate version also leaves intact a \$1.3 billion annual federal subsidy that helps poor people pay their utility bills that had been eliminated in the House version.

The amounts restored in the bill are small, but were praised by Democrats for their symbolic value. The bill also retains a commitment to give Jordan \$275 million in promised debt relief, the elimination of which in the House bill put an additional strain on the Mideast peace process.

The Clinton administration lobbied hard to get the debt relief restored by the Senate after it had been eliminated by the House. The Senate compromise will again face a fight when it goes to conference. "The House is not going to simply roll over and take

whatever they have done," House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.) told the *Washington Post*.

Republicans try to derail Mexico rescue package

A provision sponsored by Rep. Christopher Cox (R-Calif.) aimed at unraveling the Clinton administration's financial aid package to Mexico, was appended to the defense spending bill on April 4 and passed by a House-Senate conference committee on a voice vote. The measure declares that no loan, credit, guarantee, or currency swap could be made to Mexico until the President certifies that he has provided documents required by a March 1 House resolution.

The March 1 request for documentation came in reaction to President Clinton's tapping, in the face of congressional opposition to any Mexican aid package, the little-known Treasury Department currency stabilization fund to finance the package. Although the administration had said that it would comply and send the House the requested documents, Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.), chairman of the House Banking Subcommittee on Oversight, complained that the administration was responding too slowly. Therefore, the House upped the ante with this added legislation.

"Now is the wrong time for Congress to be taking actions that could have the effect of disturbing financial markets when confidence should be strengthening," warned Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin in response to the measure. Rubin said his department was providing the required records and would be "able to certify" that documents were provided.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) has also introduced legislation that would limit the use of the Treasury Department's currency stabilization fund to \$5 billion to any one country in a single year.

Simpson targets AARP in finance investigation

Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.), chairman of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Social Security, announced on April 7 that he and his staff were investigating the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and examining that organization's accounting records, hiring practices, and financial interests.

Simpson's targeting of the AARP is widely viewed as a prelude to Republican attempts to "put Social Security on the table" for cuts in an attempt to balance the budget.

The AARP is a powerful voice for retired people, most of them recipients of Social Security. If Simpson were successful in seriously damaging AARP's ability to function, it would be much easier for him and his Conservative Revolution cronies to gut Social Security as a part of their "deficit reduction" insanity. Up until now, Social Security has been considered sacrosanct by the budget-cutters, but the spokesmen of the Conservative Revolution have made it clear that they intend it for massive cuts.

"They're a huge cash-flow operation," the *New York Times* quoted Simpson as saying. Some "33 million people paying \$8 dues, bound together by a common love of airline discounts and automobile discounts and pharmacy discounts, and they haven't the slightest idea what the organization is asking for."

Simpson has refused to meet with AARP leaders to discuss his alleged concerns. Simpson also complained that AARP's demand for long-term health care for all Americans would "truly bring the country to its knees."

'Tax cut for the rich' pushed in the Senate

Senate Republicans on April 6 promised to press for a package of tax cuts similar to that passed by the House. Led by Presidential "hopeless" Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), conservative Republicans want to follow in the wake of their House counterparts and grease the palms of their wealthy constituents.

"I think this tax cut will strengthen the economy," Gramm whined. A Senate measure would also include a \$500 per child tax credit as a sop to the "middle class," as well as a considerable reduction in the capital gains tax.

Passage of such a measure in the Senate will, however, not be as easy as it was in the House, where frenzy over the Contract with America has well-nigh destroyed any ability by Republicans to weigh the consequences of their actions. Tax cuts are opposed by the two chairmen of the Senate Finance and Budget Committees, Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) and Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), respectively. More interested in instituting an "austerity regime" that can "balance the budget," Packwood and Domenici aren't keen on putting any money into a new tax cut.

Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), who has announced his campaign for President, and Whip Trent Lott (R-Miss.), are, however, committed to passing a substantial tax cut this year.