

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Foster nomination clears Senate panel

President Clinton's nominee for Surgeon General, Henry Foster, Jr., was approved by the Labor and Human Resources Committee by a 9-7 vote on May 26, the first hurdle toward gaining Senate approval. The Foster nomination was opposed by conservative Republicans who wanted a right-to-life candidate.

Ironically, the vote was decided by two Republicans: Bill Frist (Tenn.), a right-to-life supporter who knew Foster from his practice in Tennessee and decided that Foster had the commitment and integrity for the job, and James Jeffords (Vt.).

Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) has suggested that he might not bring the nomination to the floor regardless of the committee's vote, but will meet with Foster before making that decision.

Dole delays vote on foreign aid bill

Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) on May 24 postponed a vote on the foreign aid bill, a centerpiece of the Conservative Revolution agenda, apparently because the votes were just not there. The legislation would cut \$2.8 billion from the foreign affairs budget, sharply reduce foreign aid authorizations, merge three independent foreign policy agencies into the State Department, and set guidelines regarding North Korea, China, Russia, and other countries.

On May 23, President Clinton vowed to veto the legislation, calling it a "frontal assault" on Presidential authority. The Republicans had produced "the most isolationist proposals in 50 years," he said. Not only were the massive funding cuts bad, he ar-

gued, but the policy mandates in the House legislation would "compromise our efforts to stop North Korea's nuclear program, impose conditions that could derail our support for democratic reform in Russia, and restrict the President's ability to prevent illegal immigration."

Dole, a Presidential candidate, is attempting a desperate balancing act between the two poles in the Republican Party. He would like to be seen realizing the program of the Conservative Revolution Republicans, but the legislation is so extreme that it has come under criticism from Bush Republicans such as former Secretary of State James Baker III and Brent Scowcroft because of its erosion of Presidential prerogatives.

The measure evoked heated debate on the floor of the House. The American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, the largest pro-Israel lobby organization, refused to support President Clinton in opposing the bill, claiming that their demands had been met, since it contains full funding for Israel.

Workfare bill would eat up payments to states

A controversial welfare reform proposal was introduced into the Senate Finance Committee on May 24, initiating what is threatening to become a major revamping of the welfare system. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said the proposal would cut projected spending by \$41 billion over the next seven years. The House had already introduced draconian legislation on welfare reform.

The legislation, drafted by Senate Finance Committee Chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.), would mean that most states would have to spend three-quarters of the lump-sum payments

they receive, on job training, child-care, and related services, rather than on direct assistance to the poor. Under the bill, block grants would total \$16.8 billion a year from 1996 to 2000, without any adjustment for inflation, population growth, or any increase in those eligible for welfare.

The Department of Health and Human Services has estimated that 4 million children would lose federal welfare benefits, because the bill would set a five-year limit on payments to any single family. The department also said that states would have to spend \$12.7 billion a year of the total block grants for money on jobs, training, education, and child care. The department, like the CBO, concluded that many states would simply pay the financial penalties for failure to comply with the workfare aspects of the bill, rather than try to provide subsistence to welfare program members with only one-quarter of their former funds.

Senate passes balanced budget resolution

After nearly 50 hours of heated debate and two days of non-stop votes on nearly 60 amendments, the Senate approved by a vote of 57-42 a balanced budget resolution that aims at reducing the federal budget deficit by \$961 billion over the next seven years.

The Senate version includes a \$170 billion package of projected savings earmarked for tax cuts, but that only on condition that there is growth in the economy causing lower interest rates and greater tax revenue. The House would cut \$350 billion in taxes over the seven-year period.

The tax cut issue has become a major bone of contention, with many Republicans realizing that as the pain

from the cuts in social and medical spending start to hit, any tax cut, especially such a gift to the wealthy as a capital gains cut, would be a kiss-of-death come next election. Republican majorities in both chambers must now try to reach a compromise.

The Senate version would eliminate the Commerce Department, as well as more than 100 federal programs and commissions; the House legislation would axe the Commerce, Energy, and Education departments as well as 369 other agencies and commissions. Both versions call for over \$250 billion in reductions in Medicare and roughly \$180 billion in cuts in Medicaid.

Amtrak subsidies squeak by House panel

A House subcommittee voted on May 25 to get the government out of the rail passenger business and convert Amtrak into a private entity. The bill, sent to full committee on an 11-5 vote, would provide nearly \$3.6 billion over the next five years, gradually ending federal assistance by 2002. Stock held in Amtrak by the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the freight railroads would be returned, and Amtrak would be permitted to incorporate as a business and sell stock.

Created 25 years ago to take over rail passenger service from the private lines that no longer wanted to handle it, Amtrak has consistently lost money, requiring a federal subsidy of about \$1 billion annually. Seeking to reduce costs, the railroad is engaged in a 21% cut in operations across the country. "If we don't make reforms now, Amtrak is a dead duck," said Susan V. Molinari (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House Transportation railroad subcommittee. Bud Shuster (R-

Pa.) said the measure still faces tough sledding on the House floor because some members want to end subsidies immediately.

"This bill surrenders the idea of maintaining a national rail system," warned Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.). He charged that returning the Amtrak stock held by the DOT and others would create a corporation with no owners, responsible to no one. But his effort to delete that provision failed by 9-7. The freight railroads were given Amtrak stock in return for railroad equipment they turned over when the new service was created. However, since Amtrak operates in the red, the stock has no monetary value, he said. He urged, unsuccessfully, that the freight railroads be allowed to keep the stock and negotiate its sale later if Amtrak should begin making a profit.

Robert Borski (D-Pa.) said that raising the fees charged local commuter railroads just shifts Amtrak's burden onto transit riders, but his effort to delete that provision was turned back 10-6. Bob Franks (R-N.J.), however, pushed through an amendment on voice vote requiring Amtrak to spend the money on improving the Northeast Corridor.

Funding restored to Clinton defense budget

House National Security Committee Republicans approved a \$267 defense bill, adding \$9.5 billion to President Clinton's 1996 request. They did, however, rework the bill in accordance with their priorities.

The secretary of defense's staff would be reduced by 25% over the next four years, and \$171 million would be cut from the administration's \$371 million request for the Nunn-Lugar program that finances the destruction of the nuclear weapons

stocks of the former Soviet Union. Republicans also voted to add \$553 million to keep open the possibility of producing more than 20 B-2 long-range Stealth bombers, \$450 million to speed development of a system designed to guard against missile attacks against the United States, and another \$450 million to improve short-range anti-missile systems such as those used in the Persian Gulf war.

The committee also earmarked \$1.5 billion that was to be spent on a third Seawolf-class nuclear submarine, for a bigger and stealthier Seawolf and an upgraded new attack submarine, the first of a new line of more advanced submarines.

Pressler offers compromise on F-16s to Pakistan

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 23 voted 15-1 to ease U.S. sanctions on Pakistan. The bill was proposed by Larry Pressler (R-S.D.), who led the fight to impose sanctions on Pakistan in 1990 because of its nuclear weapons program. Pressler would reimburse Pakistan for F-16s it paid for but which were not delivered, by selling the F-16s to either Taiwan or the Philippines.

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, during her visit to the United States earlier in the year, had asked the United States to either turn over the 28 F-16s or reimburse its money. President Clinton had responded sympathetically, saying that it is not right for the United States to "keep the money and the equipment."

Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) sounded favorable to the plan. He said that "the United States is losing out in South Asia," because its diplomatic efforts to broker a deal between India and Pakistan are hampered by the plane impasse.