

Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

President Clinton vetoes Republican rescissions

President Clinton issued his first veto on June 7, rejecting a \$16.5 billion package of spending cuts passed by the House. "I cannot in good conscience sign a bill that cuts education to save pet congressional projects," the President said. "That is old politics. It is wrong."

Republicans, aware that they don't have the votes to override the President's veto, have said they are prepared to revamp the bill in order to work out differences. "We will probably in very quick order be able to find a bill with the same budget reduction," said House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.) "There will be some increase in social spending on the President's part and his folks will be helpful in determining where we'll find the cuts so the numbers don't change."

The rescissions would have cut from a variety of federal programs. Although the differences will undoubtedly be worked out, a bigger fight is looming in the fall over the 1996 budget.

Democrats present their own workfare bill

After Republicans recently presented a draconian measure to shift the responsibility for welfare from the federal government back to the states, Senate Democrats presented "Work First," their own, albeit less draconian, workfare bill, at a press conference on June 8.

The Democratic alternative would, as does the GOP proposal, eliminate the 60-year-old welfare program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), established in the

midst of the Depression, and replace it with temporary aid that would end after five years. It would guarantee support to poor families for no more than 60 months over a lifetime, after which able-bodied parents would be cut off and dependent children would receive a voucher to pay only for their needs. Recipients would be pushed to get private-sector jobs immediately, instead of being able to enroll in work training or educational programs, as is now the case.

The Democratic variant would, however, retain the "entitlement," or guarantee of benefits, to eligible Americans who follow all the rules, for up to five years. The Democratic plan would also require states to continue to provide their traditional levels of support for the poor and prohibit them from reducing benefits below 1988 levels, and would provide more money for child care and work programs than the Republican bill.

GOPers put habeas limits in anti-terrorism bill

On June 7, the Senate voted 91-8 to pass the Comprehensive Terrorism Prevention Act of 1995, a measure proposed by the Clinton administration in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing. Republicans added a measure that would significantly curtail *habeas corpus* appeals.

Senate Democrats unsuccessfully opposed the *habeas* limitations. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) attacked them as an attempt to "short-circuit the Constitution." The Republican tactic is "the worst kind of opportunism," he said, coming "in the wake of this national tragedy." Kennedy said that the measure "precludes meaningful review" and "increases the likeli-

hood that innocent people will be executed in this country."

The *habeas* provision has nothing to do with combatting terrorism; it apparently was added to take advantage of the outrage in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing to push through a major plank of the Contract with America agenda.

Kennedy noted that as many as 20% of all death sentences are overturned by federal *habeas* review, "very often because a defendant has been inadequately represented at trial." In addition, he said, "the bill limits the circumstances under which a death row inmate may raise a claim of innocence based on newly discovered evidence. . . . The proposal to limit inmates to one bite at the apple is sound in principle . . . but surely our interest in swift executions must give way in the face of new evidence that an innocent person is about to be put to death. . . . The attempt to jam it into the pending bill is a cynical attempt to manipulate public concern about terrorism, and the Congress should reject it." Several other amendments by Democrats attempting to mitigate the Republican restrictions were quietly tabled or voted down.

The anti-terrorism legislation would increase penalties for terrorist crimes and conspiracies involving explosives, broaden federal jurisdiction over terrorist-motivated crimes, and create a federal death penalty for terrorist murders. It would also streamline procedures for deporting alleged alien terrorists and expand the government's authority to exclude suspected alien terrorists from entering the country. The Senate voted to make it easier to get "roving" wiretaps of multiple phones that a suspect uses, but rejected a proposal to allow emergency wiretaps without a court order.

Energy panel cuts fusion, nuclear budgets

On June 8, the Energy and Environment subcommittee of the House Science Committee eliminated entire programs in advanced nuclear technology and magnetic fusion energy research in their markup of the FY 96 Department of Energy (DOE) budget.

For magnetic fusion, the Clinton administration's request of \$366 million was reduced by \$136 million, to \$229 million. The Princeton Tokamak Fusion Test Reactor (TFTR) would be shut down. Construction on the next-generation Tokamak Physics Experiment (TPX) would be halted.

Dr. Stephen Dean, who heads the industry group Fusion Power Associates, described the Republican budget as a "total disaster."

At a press conference on June 7, subcommittee Chairman and Conservative Revolution wildman Dana Rohrabacher (D-Calif.) claimed that the fusion programs were "no longer justified," even though they "may have seemed a good idea at inception." After 40 years and \$9 billion of taxpayer funds, he complained, "none of the research has reached 'break-even,' the point at which the fusion reaction generates the same amount of energy as put in."

The subcommittee's DOE budget zeroes out all funding in FY96 for the development of standardized light water nuclear reactors, which programs were co-funded with industry, for a cut of \$49.7 million. Republicans released a list of companies that supposedly benefit from "corporate welfare" through the federal R&D programs, in an attempt to justify the cut. The Advanced Reactor R&D program, to develop the next-generation liquid metal and high-temperature gas-cooled reactors, had already been eliminated in the Clinton budget. The

Republican budget adds \$25 million, but the money is contingent upon the outcome of a National Academy of Sciences review now under way.

R&D programs in the Environmental Protection Agency were also cut by 22%, solar and renewable programs in the DOE were cut in half, and the budget for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, upon which weather forecasting depends, was cut 22%.

Dorgan urges support for family farming

In remarks on the Senate floor on June 5, Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) suggested that the next five-year farm bill ought to help farmers actually produce food. "We ought to have an economy that rewards less speculation and rewards more real production," Dorgan said.

Dorgan proposed that "we structure farm program price supports . . . so that the strongest price goes to the first increment of production." In other words, a farmer should get a parity price for the first 20,000 bushels of wheat that he raises and take his chances with the market for any amount over 20,000. "We do not need to provide a stimulant for corporate agrifactories to plow," he added, because they "will darn sure make certain that consumers would be paying well above the cost of production for food."

Dorgan urged his colleagues to give more consideration to maintaining a functioning agriculture based on the traditional family farm. "Now for social and economic reasons, this country ought to care about who produces its foodstuffs," he said. "It ought to care about the farm belt. It ought to care about preserving a net-

work of family farmers. For that reason, we ought to have a safety net, not for a set of golden arches or for the largest agrifactories, but a safety net for family farmers."

Conservative Revolution backers are targeting Republican members in farm states who have been less interested in cutting farmers off at the knees, in an attempt to eliminate farm subsidies entirely.

House GOPers intent on tax cut for the wealthy

As congressional negotiators got together on June 8 to work out a budget plan, House Republicans voted overwhelmingly to reaffirm their support for a \$354 billion tax cut, despite the fact that this issue is causing a major rift with Senate Republicans.

The Senate version of the budget contains no specific tax cuts, and doesn't promise anything more than \$170 billion in tax relief later on and that only on condition that Congress has successfully worked out a plan to eliminate the budget deficit. Senate Republicans are more intent on imposing budget austerity than offering their constituents the "bonus" of a tax giveaway.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) has barred Rep. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) from the House-Senate conference committee. Gramm has threatened to "kill the budget" if it does not "eliminate the deficit and cut taxes." Gramm had proposed an amendment in May that would have added most of the House's \$354 billion, seven-year package of tax cuts for families and businesses to the Senate budget resolution. The Gramm amendment was defeated in a 69-31 vote.