

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

### Welfare proposal passes the Senate

The Senate passed a welfare reform proposal sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) by a vote of 87-12 on Sept. 19, after adopting a series of compromises aimed at bringing on board enough conservative Republicans and moderate Democrats to ensure passage. The "reform" would undermine welfare relief and eliminate the government commitment to provide a social safety net for the poor that has been in effect for the last 60 years.

Divisions among Senate Republicans made it impossible for Dole to bring up the bill before the August recess. When the Senate returned, Dole tried to make the legislation more palatable for conservative Republicans by adding a "family cap," championed by Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), in which states would not be allowed to give higher cash payments to welfare families who have more children, and providing a "bonus" for states that reduce out-of-wedlock births. The "family cap" was rejected by the Senate on a vote of 66-34, with Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) leading the charge to eliminate the "cap," arguing that it would punish innocent children and could lead to an increase in abortions.

With Democrats objecting to the deleterious effect of the legislation on children, Dole added \$3 billion for child care to welfare mothers who go to work. Dole also offered further concessions to Democrats, creating an emergency fund for states that need help because of a recession or increase in poverty, and adding money to be used for welfare during periods of high unemployment.

The Dole measure would require welfare recipients to find jobs or enter training within six months of receiv-

ing benefits, and restricts the aggregate time on welfare to five years. If they can't find jobs, they must "volunteer" for community service work.

Responsibility for maintaining welfare has largely been turned over to the states. The bill would create a \$16.8 billion block-grant program, to be distributed as the individual states deem necessary. Generated by the anti-immigrant bias among Republicans, the bill prohibits virtually all non-citizens from receiving Supplemental Security Income funds, bars new immigrants from safety net programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children for five years, and, in determining welfare eligibility, requires the income of the applicant's sponsors to be "deemed" available to the immigrant for the first five years they are residents.

The House version prohibits states from giving cash grants to women who have babies while on welfare and to teenagers who have babies out of wedlock. President Clinton has indicated that he would sign the Senate version, but White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, on "Face the Nation" on Sept. 17, warned that the welfare reform measure would face a presidential veto if, during conference committee, it moved nearer to the more draconian House version.

### Democrats demand hearings on Medicare

Democrats are demanding extensive hearings on Medicare before considering Republican proposals to cut the program. Republicans allowed only one day for hearings, on Sept. 21, fearful that scrutiny may further erode any public support the legislation has currently.

Because of a failure by the Repub-

licans to be specific, there is serious doubt that their proposed cuts would lead to the reductions they claim. On Sept. 15, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) said that the Republican plans were "a dense fog of unspecified savings, unverified numbers, and unrealistic promises." The Congressional Budget Office has been unable to evaluate what savings the Republican proposal would actually achieve.

The House and the Senate have separate plans, but are in agreement in requiring an increase in the Medicare premium from \$46.10 a month now, to about \$90 a month by the year 2002. Both would also make deep cuts in payments to hospitals and doctors.

The Republican goal is to find \$270 billion in savings in Medicare over seven years. Republicans readily admit that they still have to reduce spending by \$30 billion to reach that goal. The House proposal is still roughly \$80 billion short of its target. The goal of the Republican proposal is to convince 37 million elderly Americans on Medicare to switch from the fee-for-service system to health maintenance organizations and private plans.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) appeared together with "outsider" Ross Perot at a national town hall meeting on Sept. 15, to plug the Republican Medicare proposal. The meeting was broadcast by satellite by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Both Perot and Gingrich claimed that the Medicare "reform" proposal was not a proposal to "cut spending below the current area," but rather an attempt to "fix" Medicare.

Later in the day, President Clinton warned a group of senior citizens in the Old Executive Office Building, "If these health care cuts come to my desk, of this size, I would have no choice but to veto them."

## Commerce bill may split Republicans

Republican attempts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Commerce have created divisions within party ranks. Freshmen Republican Conservative Revolution ideologues, who want to put a "for sale" sign on the department, have been taken aback by the plethora of new agencies created by their more senior Republican colleagues, who recognize that the functions of the department must be preserved. Conflicts within the Republican Party over how far the dismantling should go could derail the entire measure.

The authorizing committees responsible for the department have reported out legislation creating 12 or 13 new agencies to take over the various responsibilities that the Commerce Department has had.

On Sept. 14, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee voted to replace Commerce's Economic Development Administration with regional commissions. The House Science Committee voted to make the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) into an independent agency, the National Marine Resources Administration. The House Ways and Means Committee has voted to create a new U.S. Trade Administration.

Unhappy with the way the committees were handling the legislation, House Commerce Committee Chairman Thomas Bliley (R-Va.) succeeded in passing a measure out of his committee on Sept. 19 that would maintain very few of the traditional Commerce functions, placing the NOAA under the Agriculture Department, and creating a U.S. Trade Administration under the U.S. Trade Representative to handle trade issues. Democrats on the Bliley committee complained that they had not received

copies of the 143-page legislation until the night before, and therefore had no idea of what provisions it contained.

## Farm bill targets farmers, children

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) made a plea to his party colleagues at a Capitol Hill press conference on Sept. 13, to pass one of the farm proposals aimed at cutting farm subsidies and other farm programs by \$48 billion by 2002. There are deep divisions among Republican committee members over how draconian the cuts should be and over which items should be targeted. Senate Democrats stand united with the White House in opposing any major farm-program cuts.

Lugar claimed that there are only three paths to reaching the budget reduction goal: his proposal of reducing target prices; the proposal of House Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), which would eliminate price supports and replace them with a welfare grant; and the proposal of Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.), which would reduce the amount of acreage on which price support payments are made.

The House has already approved proposals to cut child nutrition programs by \$30.1 billion under the farm bill. But farm-state Republicans are balking, and several Republicans on the Agriculture Committee have shown more favor to the Cochran proposal for decreasing the amount of land on which federal subsidies will be paid. Lugar judges the chances for his bill in committee at no better than 50-50. If the measure cannot be passed through the Agriculture committees, Lugar warns, the task of writ-

ing a farm bill will then fall to the Senate Budget Committee, where there will be perhaps even less desire to maintain family farming.

## Senate panel restores health, education funds

A Senate Appropriations subcommittee responsible for the departments of Labor and Health and Human Services, eliminated a number of riders attached to the House version of spending bills for these departments. Senate subcommittee chairman Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) warned that "the money allotted is totally insufficient to deal with this country's problems."

The Senate bill provides \$32 million more than the House for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and matches last year's allocations for the National Labor Relations Board. At the same time, however, the Specter subcommittee approved deep reductions in job training programs. Unlike its House counterpart, the Senate bill will not prohibit the funding of the Surgeon General's office, but a fight over this issue is expected when the bill reaches the floor. In addition, the Senate panel restored money for heat subsidies for low-income families, which had been zeroed-out in the House version, and for President Clinton's Goals 2000. The panel also eliminated riders that would restrict abortions, fetal research, federal pensions, labor laws, and worker safety regulations.

This is not, of course, the end of the story. "The riders are not dead," said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.). After consideration by the full Senate, it will have to be reconciled with the more draconian House version.