

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Defense Appropriations stalled in House

After a fractious debate on Sept. 29, the House rejected, on a vote of 267-151, the final version of a \$243 billion Defense Appropriations bill, and sent it back to be renegotiated with the Senate. Despite intense lobbying by Majority Leader Dick Arme (R-Tex.) and House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.), conservative Republicans joined with Democrats to send the bill back to conference committee.

In reconciling the House and Senate versions of the bill, conferees had toned down anti-abortion provisions that had been put into the House version, including one that would have prohibited abortions in military hospitals. In the final version, that provision was made contingent upon the passage of a similar provision in a pending Defense Authorization bill. This was not enough for anti-abortion groups, including the Christian Coalition and National Right to Life Committee, which lobbied to kill the bill because of the weakening of the abortion provision.

The measure also included funding of two more B-2 Stealth bombers, as well as warplanes, ships, and other weapons that President Clinton deemed unnecessary. "In effect, the President won today," said the bill's floor manager, Bill Young (R-Fla.), chairman of the House National Security Appropriations Subcommittee. "He didn't want it and he won," Young said, referring to the fact that President Clinton had threatened to veto the bill if it came to his desk.

Democrats were opposed to the size of the appropriations, which were greater than those requested by the Defense Department. Young said that the bill was defeated primarily by abortion opponents, but that other

groups also contributed. Some members opposed the bill because it weakened a House provision that would have required Clinton to get Congress's approval in advance of sending U.S. troops to Bosnia. The final bill makes only a non-binding "sense of Congress" statement that Clinton should do so.

### House passes multi-year space station bill

Although hailed by NASA Administrator Dan Goldin and by House Science Committee Chairman Robert Walker (R-Pa.) as a major victory, the passage by voice vote of H.R. 1601 on Sept. 28, a multi-year authorization of the space station program, was opposed, ironically, by some of the station's most ardent supporters. The House approval guarantees a multi-year, \$13.1 billion bill to authorize work on Space Station Alpha through its final assembly in the year 2002.

For years, when the space station was not receiving strong congressional support, advocates sought to secure multi-year authorization to avoid the annual slugfest over the program. But this year, the total NASA budget is under such severe threat, that the idea of "fencing off" and protecting funds for the \$2.1 billion station for each of the next seven years, could threaten the rest of the space agency's programs.

The ranking minority member on the Science Committee, George Brown (D-Calif.), has warned that the cuts the Republicans have in store for NASA could make the space station program unsustainable. Brown has written President Clinton, asking him to veto the bill.

For one, the Space Shuttle is the transport system for bringing U.S.

station equipment and astronauts to the facility. While there is no complete agreement on how the cuts in the Shuttle program will affect safety, Goldin has permanently cut flights back from eight to seven per year. Overall, the Republican budget would deliver a NASA budget for fiscal year 1996 of about \$13.67 billion, or 5% below the FY 95 level. The Republicans have proposed cutting NASA's five-year funding more than \$4 billion above and beyond the \$5 billion in reductions that have been proposed by the Clinton administration. By the turn of the century, NASA's budget, in real dollars, could be reduced to two-thirds of what it is now.

### Troops to Bosnia meets opposition

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.) and Bill Young (R-Fla.), chairman of the National Security Subcommittee, warned President Bill Clinton in a letter on Sept. 28 that it would be foolhardy for him to veto a \$243 billion defense bill at a time when he may need Congress's support for sending U.S. troops to Bosnia.

They told Clinton that an agreement between the White House and Congress on sending U.S. troops to Bosnia would be difficult even in a cooperative atmosphere. "Frankly, we find it incomprehensible that you may be simultaneously considering vetoing the defense bill while pursuing a diplomatic solution in Bosnia which has as a centerpiece a sizable and costly deployment of American forces," they wrote. "This combination strikes us as being both totally incoherent and indefensible."

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole

(R-Kan.) also wrote in a letter to President Clinton on Sept. 25 that Congress should be consulted before U.S. ground troops are committed to Bosnia. President Clinton has pledged to contribute up to 25,000 U.S. troops to an allied mission to enforce a Bosnia peace agreement now being negotiated, if an agreement is reached. Dole expressed strong skepticism toward the plan. "I cannot conceive of supporting a plan that sends U.S. troops into Bosnia, while leaving the Bosnians unable to defend themselves against future aggression," Dole said on Sept. 27.

Dole has been a prime mover of legislation to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia, a measure the administration has resisted, in hopes of achieving a peace agreement soon. Dole said he had asked three Senate committees to hold extensive hearings on whether U.S. troops should be sent. The *Washington Post* reports that the administration was considering asking Congress to approve up to \$1 billion for the U.S. peacekeeping troops. President Clinton met with congressional leaders at the White House after a preliminary agreement was reached with Balkan foreign ministers at a meeting of the Contact Group in New York on Sept. 26.

## **G**overnment will keep running until Nov. 13

The White House and congressional leaders agreed on Sept. 27 on a spending bill that will keep the government running through Nov. 13. This averted a threatened government shutdown, because most of the appropriations bills to finance the government are either locked up in internal congressional wrangling or threatened by

a presidential veto.

Only two of the 13 bills have been sent to the White House. One of them, appropriations for military construction, was signed by the President. The other, regulating expenses for the Legislative branch, has been temporarily "pocketed" by the President. The measure maintains for a time AmeriCorps and Goals 2000, favorite programs of the President, although these are slated for elimination in Republican-supported appropriations bills.

The 44-day plan will, however, force the government to operate at a funding level more than 10% below the level of the past year. In a concession to government workers, Republicans agreed that any agency could draw additional funds if it appeared that the temporary measure would force layoffs. The House passed the measure on Sept. 28, the Senate on Sept. 29, and the President signed the bill on Sept. 30.

More critical will be the Nov. 13 deadline, when the temporary funding bill runs out. The Congress must then raise the debt ceiling or the United States will default on its debt. In a blatant attempt to blackmail the administration, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has repeated threats not to raise the debt ceiling unless Clinton agrees to sign the appropriations bills. Mouthing the arguments of some Wall Street investment bankers, Gingrich claims that, far from having an adverse effect on world markets, the markets might "like" a default if they thought it was done in the interest of budget cutting.

President Clinton's top economic adviser thought otherwise. On Sept. 26, speaking to a group of reporters, Joseph Stiglitz called a U.S. default on its obligations "unthinkable." He warned, "A default is unthinkable and the United States never had a default. . . . The in-

creases in the interest rates could be substantial. It's estimated that each basis point, that's 1/100th of 1% of an interest rate (point), would increase the cost by about \$495 million a year. Over a seven-year horizon each basis point costs Treasury \$3.5 billion."

## **D**emocrats storm out of Medicare vote

Attempting to ram through its legislation on Medicare, the House Commerce Committee time and again rejected Democratic calls for hearings on the legislation. At one point on Oct. 2, Democrats walked out of the committee session.

Realizing the political sensitivity of the issue, House Republicans were hoping to secure passage without any probe into the content of the measure or of its consequences for the elderly. "The bill is essentially an outrage," said Frank Pallone (D-N.J.). "Senior citizens are supposed to pay more to get less."

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.C.) called the Republican proposal "a Medicare melt-down."

The Senate Finance Committee had passed its version of the Medicare bill on Sept. 29. The Republican proposal would cut \$270 billion out of Medicare over seven years, through a combination of premium hikes and means-testing for recipients. It would also reduce fees to doctors serving patients in the program, which could lead many physicians to refuse to treat Medicare patients. The Republicans also seem keen on carrying out their "Contract on America" by using the "savings" from their Medicare "reform" to give a tax cut to the rich, a move that has caused outrage among senior citizens.