

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Minimum wage proposal set for vote in Senate

Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) reached agreement on June 25 to bring the House-passed minimum wage increase to the floor of the Senate for debate on July 8. Prior to the vote, each side will have the opportunity to bring up an amendment, Edward Kennedy (Mass.) for the Democrats and Christopher Bond (Mo.) for the Republicans, with one hour of debate and a vote on each amendment before a vote on the House bill.

As part of the agreement, the Senate will also take up a labor relations reform bill and the bill to repeal the 4.3¢ gasoline tax increase of 1993, also previously passed by the House. The agreement does not include the Kennedy-Kassebaum health insurance reform bill, however. That is still hung up over disagreement on medical savings accounts.

Before the agreement was reached, Lott secured unanimous consent that minimum-wage amendments would not be offered during debate on the defense authorization bill on June 18-19. Daschle said June 20 that he was confident that "we can finally announce the agreement and get the consent to go to the bill" right after the July 4 recess.

The week was punctuated, however, by each side blaming the other for the failure to come to an agreement. On June 19, Lott told the Senate that it was the Democrats who were holding up an agreement. Kennedy shot back that "the reason it has been languishing is those who for over a year and a half have denied this body the opportunity to vote when we have been able to demonstrate in previous votes a majority of the body will vote for an increase in the minimum wage." Though more conciliatory when the agreement was announced, Kennedy noted that the

agreement only came after "obstruction, delay, and stonewalling has been put aside."

Walsh demands more austerity from District

House D.C. Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman James Walsh (R-N.Y.) on June 20 called the proposed District of Columbia budget "unacceptable," because it includes a \$500 million deficit. He told an interviewer, "The District has to live within its means like any other city. The District has annual revenues of \$5 billion and it should only spend \$5 billion."

Walsh demanded that the District give up to the federal government such functions as corrections, which it has serious difficulty funding. He endorsed closing the University of the District of Columbia and D.C. General Hospital. Giving students vouchers and closing the university would save \$40 million, and the closing of D.C. General would save even more, he said.

Walsh also complained that there is no difference between the financial control board, Mayor Marion Barry, and the D.C. City Council: They've all shown they can talk about the District's financial problems, but none of them can control spending. "The District," he said, "is at the top of the charts on city spending but at the bottom in the delivery of services. The Democrats have allowed it for 12 years and I don't want it on my watch."

Walsh is ignoring the impact that closing the hospital and the university would have on the poor of the District. D.C. General is the only public hospital available to most of southeast Washington, and even though it has been suffering financial difficulties for some years, closing it would mean that

a large portion of the District's population would not have access to medical services. The university, which has the lowest tuition rates in the city, makes accessible a higher education to the city's working poor.

Democrats offer another welfare reform plan

On June 20, a group of Democratic senators, led by Minority Leader Tom Daschle (S.D.), offered another welfare reform proposal. Daschle said, at a press conference on the plan, that it "incorporates the best ideas from more than a year and a half of welfare reform debate."

Elements of the plan include a five-year limit on benefits, requiring able-bodied recipients to work, and funds to help people find jobs and keep them. It also includes a "safety net" for children, and vouchers to cover the cost of health care when the parents have used up all their benefits. "It's wrong to punish children for the bad choices or bad luck of their parents," said Daschle.

Both Daschle and John Breaux (D-La.) said that there is broad agreement in the Senate for welfare reform. The only thing holding it back, is "the insistence by those on the far right to link welfare reform to cuts in Medicaid in order to force a Presidential veto and score some political points," Daschle said. Breaux pointed out that there were voices on the Republican side calling for the separation of Medicaid reform from welfare reform, and that the best thing the Republican leadership could do is "heed the recommendations of their own members and let's do what we can agree on and postpone till later those things that there is yet no agreement on, like Medicaid."

The Daschle-Breaux proposal is

based on the same presumptions as all previous welfare reform efforts. It assumes that reform necessarily means a reduction and eventual cutoff of benefits, and it requires work even though the real unemployment rate in the United States, when discouraged and part-time workers are included, is over 14%.

Apprehend Karadzic, Mladic, says Lieberman

On June 21, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), with five co-sponsors, introduced a sense of the Senate resolution calling for the reimposition of full economic sanctions against the Republic of Serbia for failing to comply with its obligations under the Dayton peace agreement. The resolution also calls for IFOR forces to make it "an urgent priority to detain and bring to justice persons indicted by" the UN's International Criminal Tribunal investigating and trying war crimes committed during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Lieberman, in remarks on the Senate floor, called for more aggressive efforts to apprehend and bring to justice the indicted war criminals Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. He said that because there can be no long-term peace without justice, "the time has come for this body to restate that the apprehension of these indicted war criminals must be an urgent priority. It is time for concerted action to bring these indicted war criminals to justice."

Lieberman claimed that if IFOR acted to arrest Karadzic and Mladic, it would have the same result as what happened in Somalia. "The detention of war criminals has always been part of IFOR's mandate," he said. "The intention of this resolution is to make

clear that an agreed-upon aspect of the IFOR mission, to detain war criminals and bring them to justice, must remain an urgent priority and must be carried out effectively."

Pennsylvania Ave. should be reopened, says Senate

The Senate, on June 19, passed a sense of the Senate resolution calling for reopening Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. President Clinton ordered the street closed in May 1995 at the recommendation of the Secret Service, after the April 19, 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The closing came in the middle of a British-run operation to assassinate Clinton (see *EIR*, Dec. 2, 1994, "British Monarchy Takes Aim at Another President").

Rod Grams (R-Minn.), the lead sponsor of the resolution, claims that the closing contributes nothing to White House security, has caused intractable traffic problems, and has converted 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue into a "Federal Fortress," which insulates the White House from the general public.

Grams's resolution was ridiculed by Harry Reid (D-Nev.), who said that the loudest complaints about the closure come from lobbyists who have trouble maneuvering their limousines through packed city streets. Reid said, "We cannot be sending a message to terrorists around the world that we are going to ease up on our security." He questioned why the Senate should even be debating this issue when other issues, such as the minimum wage, welfare reform, and health care reform, were demanding attention. "This is an issue that we should not be involved in," he said.

Opponents of the resolution suc-

ceeded in adding a section that specifies that the secretary of the Treasury and the Secret Service must "certify that the plan protects the security of the people who live and work in the White House."

House passes sanctions against Iran, Libya

On June 19, the House unanimously passed a bill targeting Iran and Libya, by imposing U.S. sanctions on non-American companies. The bill goes after companies involved in developing oil resources in both nations, and, in Libya, developing weapons, aviation, and related capabilities. International Relations Committee Chairman Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) said that enactment of the bill "can sharply diminish the future revenues from oil and gas production of these rogue regimes and will put a halt to their campaigns of state-sponsored terrorism and their efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction."

Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.) agreed that this was necessary because, "despite our best efforts and despite the egregious conduct of Iran and Libya, many of our friends have maintained their ties with both countries. So the dilemma here for United States policy is to find ways to increase the economic isolation of Iran and Libya without causing undue harm to our own economy or to our relations with our allies." He added, "The ultimate goal of this bill is not to punish foreign firms, but to persuade other governments to adopt measures that squeeze the economies of Iran and Libya." The bill, like the Helms-Burton legislation tightening sanctions against Cuba, has been criticized by European nations for attempting to impose U.S. policy on them.