

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Bumpers again tries to shut down space station

Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) made his annual attempt to shut down the NASA space station, during debate on the Veterans Administration, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies appropriations bill on Sept. 4. Bumpers, putting himself into the straitjacket of budget politics, argued that cancelling the space station is the only way to save other discretionary spending programs, such as education, which will otherwise be devastated in order to provide the \$100 billion in funding the station will require to the year 2012. "The more money you pour into wasteful spending, like the space station," he argued, "the less you are going to have for the thing you love the most, your children."

Bumpers predicted that the space station will be a financial disaster. He ridiculed the notion that the space program has had any scientific benefits, heretofore, and said he would answer any such arguments by saying, "Ask the Russians. They have had a space station for 25 years. Ask them. What have they gotten? I will tell you the answer: nothing."

A number of senators got up to defend the space station, including John Glenn (D-Ohio) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Tex.). However, the most spirited defense came from Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.). Mikulski began her remarks by noting "how ironic it is, at this time of great space discoveries like the possibility of life on Mars, that my colleague wants to eliminate one of NASA's greatest programs." She pointed out that thousands of jobs are at stake in the program, and suggested that in an era of defense conversion, "the space station is an opportunity to retain our high-tech manufacturing skills for a civilian economy."

On the scientific side, Mikulski said, "The thinking behind the Bumpers amendment is the same kind of thinking that would stifle our understanding of bacteria and germs that cause disease. It is the kind of philosophy that would have stopped Madame Curie from discovering radium, from which the field of radiology developed, or Jonas Salk from finding the cure for polio."

The space station isn't just about science, but also technology, she said. "By the mere fact of building the station and by the mere fact of doing medical and life science and crystal development, in order to do the research, we have to develop new technology," she said. Bumpers's amendment was tabled by a vote of 60-37.

Armed Forces to stay under U.S. command

On Sept. 5, the House passed, by a vote of 299-109, the so-called "Armed Forces Protection Act," to limit the placing of U.S. military forces under any foreign command (meaning the United Nations) and to prohibit the wearing of any foreign insignia by U.S. military personnel, unless authorized by Congress.

The bill is nearly identical to a provision in last year's defense authorization bill, which was one of the reasons that President Clinton vetoed that bill, a fact seized upon by the Republican backers of the bill. Rules Committee Chairman Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.) said the veto "fits a pattern established by this President of allowing our military forces to be dragged into multinational and other missions which have little or no bearing on our national security."

Jim Saxton (R-N.J.) added, "It is particularly frustrating if not down-

right dangerous to see the growing tendency of this administration to cede operational control of U.S. forces to the ill-equipped, ill-prepared bureaucratic United Nations." This was as close as anybody came to attacking the UN.

Opponents questioned the constitutionality of the bill, and criticized it as putting too much of a limit on the President's authority as commander-in-chief. Ron Dellums (D-Calif.) said it will restrict the President from "establishing command relations that best meet the military situation our troops may face." He added that it sends the wrong message to potential allies "that we do not trust your officers," resulting in greater likelihood "we will go it alone" rather than participate in coalition efforts.

Senate Dems push through agenda, with GOP help

Senate Democrats, with considerable support from the Republican caucus, succeeded in passing three of their Families First agenda items as amendments to the Veterans Administration, HUD, and Independent Agencies appropriations bill on Sept. 5.

The first item was the "Newborns' and Mothers' Health Protection Act of 1996," requiring insurance companies to pay for hospital stays of at least 48 hours for women giving birth vaginally, and 96 hours for deliveries by caesarean section. The second was an amendment that provides for parity between mental health policies and physical health policies. The third, and the only one that faced a threat of being killed, provides veterans benefits for the children of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War who are suffering from birth defects.

Kit Bond (R-Mo.) tried to get a parliamentary ruling that the amendment, sponsored by Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), was in violation of Senate rules, because it was a legislative matter that could not be attached to an appropriations bill. His motion was defeated by a vote of 62-35. Daschle said the next day that their passage "sets a prototype for the appropriations bills that will be coming up for the balance of the month."

Daschle indicated that when the Treasury-Postal Service appropriations bill comes to the floor, Democrats would be offering amendments on education, pension security, and runaway industries. He said that he expected the amendments passed with the VA-HUD bill to get to the President's desk, even if funding ended up being taken care of in a catch-all continuing resolution.

Lott willing to adjourn before end of business

The Republican majority in Congress has set Sept. 27 or 28 as their target date for adjournment of the 104th Congress. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) said on Sept. 4 that it is his intention to finish up all the appropriations bills before then, but that a continuing resolution will be ready by Sept. 23 if there is still disagreement on any of the funding bills at that time.

Two days later, however, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) indicated that the Democrats might be willing to keep Congress in session well into October in order to finish the legislative agenda. "For the Republicans to leave town just to campaign is something that I think will take some explaining, and this is a good reason why: All these bills [in-

cluding other legislation besides the funding bills] have worked their way through the process. They're waiting to be considered, and now for us to just close the door, lock the box and say, 'Better luck next year,' to me, is not what the American people expect."

Brown says Dole budget would 'devastate R&D'

In a statement Sept. 5 to the Senate Democratic Policy Committee Forum, Rep. George Brown (Calif.), the ranking Democrat on the House Science and Technology Committee, said that the proposed Dole tax cuts and budget would harm federal research and development investment "even more than the original Gingrich 'Contract with America' budget would have. I estimate that the Dole plan would result in a reduction of at least 40% in federal non-defense R&D spending, from the levels of those programs in fiscal year 1995."

Brown said, "Cuts of this magnitude would have a drastic impact on our nation's economic progress and competitiveness in global markets, would devastate research infrastructure that has taken 50 years to develop and which is the envy of the world, and would result in the closure of many national research facilities, especially those funded by the Department of Energy, NASA, and the Department of Commerce. In short, it would be a giant step backward for this nation."

"When President Reagan proposed a supply-side approach 15 years ago," he continued, "it was characterized by some as voodoo economics. Mr. Dole's plan could be better labeled vampire economics, because it sucks the lifeblood from our nation's future by devastating our science and technology efforts."

Brown, who has been the only outspoken Democratic critic of the White House's proposed cuts in R&D, and who has ridiculed the goal of a balanced budget, said: "Over the last several years, I have objected to economic proposals that fail to distinguish between outlays and investments. . . . Our research and development programs are an investment in our future and should not be sacrificed as offsets for an election year tax cut."

Brown, one of the few engineers in the Congress, concluded: "I plan to make the science, engineering, and academic community aware of the threat that this plan poses to their valuable activities, and working with them, hope to ensure that it is never given the opportunity to become a reality."

Ethics panel taking heat on Gingrich probe

On Sept. 5, two Democrats took to the House floor to demand a report on the Gingrich ethics investigation. Harold Volkmer (D-Mo.) reported that the special counsel hired by the ethics panel filed a report a month ago, but "it has disappeared." Volkmer surmised that if the report had exonerated Gingrich, "we would have seen it. . . . My guess is that it is maybe not real bad, but bad enough that they want to submerge it."

Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.) reported that she saw a newspaper article reporting that the special counsel's report might not be considered until after the election. If true, she said, "I think this body should all be aware of that, and we ought to put people on record as to whether they agree with that decision, because I do not think the American people would agree with that decision and I think it is a real violation of our trusteeship."