

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Budget resolution passes House, Senate

On May 20, the House passed its version of the Fiscal Year 1998 budget resolution, based on the budget agreement reached between President Clinton and Congressional Republicans on May 2, which will supposedly balance the budget by 2002, by a vote of 333-99. Along the way, four Democratic alternatives, all of which would have decreased defense spending and delayed tax cuts to increase funding for education, health care, and other areas of the budget, were easily defeated. The biggest threat to the resolution came from an alternative sponsored by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bud Shuster (R-Pa.), which was defeated by only two votes.

Shuster's amendment called for an across-the-board 0.39% cut in spending, in order to increase transportation funding by \$12 billion over five years. Shuster justified the increased funding by pointing out the condition of highway infrastructure in the United States. "All across America, our infrastructure is crumbling," he said. "Thirty percent of our interstate system needs to be rebuilt; 25% of our bridges are structurally deficient." To maintain even these levels, Shuster said, \$16 billion a year more in highway funding is required.

Shuster complained that under the budget resolution, "the \$33 billion balances in the four transportation trust funds will increase to \$65 billion in the next five years." Shuster has consistently argued that these funds should be spent on transportation needs rather than being used to mask the actual amount of the budget deficit. He added that while the supporters of the resolution say it increases transportation funding by \$8 billion over five years, the effective increase is

only about \$1-2 billion.

Shuster's amendment was supported by a broad coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats, and opposed by an equally broad coalition of budget cutters from both parties, led by House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio) and John Spratt (D-S.C.). While Spratt expressed concern over the effects Shuster's amendment might have on other parts of the budget, Kasich defended the "integrity" of the budget agreement upon which the resolution was based. Yet, the figures on which the budget projections are based are dubious at best, and the cuts in the budget accelerate the economic depression.

On May 23, the Senate followed suit. In the debate, transportation, children's health insurance, and school construction funding were contentious issues. The resolution now heads to a conference committee to iron out the differences between the two versions.

Religious persecution bill is introduced

On May 19, Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) and Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) introduced "The Freedom from Religious Persecution Act," a bill authored by Christian Solidarity International, which represents an escalation in the British monarchy's campaign to insert a human rights gestapo into the U.S. government. Accompanying Wolf and Specter were House Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Gilman (R-N.Y.), Sens. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.) and Tim Hutchinson (R-Ark.), and Rep. Tony Hall (D-Ohio), a board member of CSI.

The bill would create a new White House position, "Director of Religious

Persecution Monitoring," which would issue an annual report assessing whether Category I or Category II religious persecution exists in a country. Category I is government-sponsored persecution, and Category II is where the government fails to make a "serious and sustained effort" to eliminate persecution. Sanctions would be automatic upon a positive finding by the director, but could be waived by the President, subject to a written explanation to Congress and a 45-day notice of intent to waive. Sanctions include the banning of exports to foreign government entities that "directly carry out acts of religious persecution," and the mandate of U.S. opposition to international loans.

The bill would impose immediate sanctions against Sudan. Wolf said, "The sanctions prescribed in this bill are virtually identical to those imposed on South Africa in the anti-apartheid act of the 1980s, such as a ban on flights, a ban on investment, and a ban on imports." He claimed that the persecution in Sudan is "some of the worst" he had ever seen, and described his bill as a "Jackson-Vanik for the 1990s."

A group of independent U.S. legislators who visited Sudan last year, under the auspices of the Schiller Institute, found no evidence of slavery and the other violations that Wolf and his British sponsors are claiming (see *EIR*, Oct. 10, 1996).

China MFN trade status debate heats up

The battle over most favored nation trading status for China is now shaping up into three camps: those who support President Clinton's decision to renew MFN for China, those who would link

permanent MFN with China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), and those who are absolutely opposed to any extension of MFN.

On May 27, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.) announced their support for Clinton's decision. Lieberman called trade with China a "desirable fact of life" that means "jobs and prosperity for workers in the U.S. and continued pressure for democratic reform in China."

On human rights issues, Lieberman said, "The one thing we know is that there are actually local elections going in the villages, and secondly, when we think about human rights, we have to think about the human rights that come with the rising standard of living that is being enjoyed there from the open economy policy they have been following there since 1978."

Lieberman reported that when he and Sen. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) visited China earlier this year, they found a "much more complicated situation" regarding religious freedom. "The churches were open," he said, "people were worshipping regularly. Are there some clergy in jail there because they have been organizing? Apparently so." But the question, he said, is "how do we move them in the right direction?"

Rep. Doug Bereuter (R-Neb.) and Senate Finance Committee Chairman William Roth (R-Del.) are leading the effort to link the granting of permanent MFN status with China's entry into the WTO. Bereuter is co-sponsoring a bill in the House that would do that; John Chafee (R-R.I.) and Max Baucus (D-Mont.) have introduced a similar bill in the Senate. Bereuter testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 23 that threats to revoke MFN are not credible because the Chinese know it won't happen. He said that us-

ing permanent MFN as leverage to get China to conform to WTO standards as a precondition for entry would be more effective.

A vote is expected in July on a bill to overturn President Clinton's decision. Reps. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Frank Wolf (R-Va.) are the lead sponsors of that effort.

Lautenberg targets Yugoslav war criminals

On May 23, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), with eight co-sponsors, introduced a bill that would impose sanctions on nations that provide refuge to any indicted war criminals sought by the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia. The bill would require the President to certify that the signatories to the Dayton Peace Agreement are cooperating in the apprehension and transfer of war criminals to the tribunal. If, after a six-month waiver provided in the bill, a country is certified as not cooperating, then all U.S. assistance to that country, with the exception of humanitarian assistance, is withheld until "all indicted war criminals have been arrested and turned over" to the Hague.

Lautenberg said that the purpose of his bill is to "create incentives for the parties to the Dayton Peace Agreement to arrest indicted war criminals and transfer them" to the Hague. He said that the lack of willingness to use force to apprehend indicted war criminals means another approach is necessary. "If indicted war criminals remain at-large when SFOR's mission ends, our prestige and credibility will be severely undermined. America may be able to protect NATO troops by not involving them in a mission to arrest indicted war criminals, but we cannot

protect our reputation and that of NATO as a defender of democracy and human rights if indicted war criminals roam the region with impunity when our troops withdraw."

Disaster aid bill still at an impasse

The Congress recessed on May 23 for the Memorial Day weekend without coming to an agreement with President Clinton on disaster aid for the flood-stricken Plains states in the supplemental appropriations bill. The sticking point remains the permanent continuing resolution (CR) which the Republicans attached to the bill.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), after a meeting with Clinton, reported on May 20, "We had a very good conversation on not closing the government. . . . [Clinton] was very positive in a broad way in trying to find a common ground to enable us to do that."

The next day, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) would only say to reporters that "they" were working on it, referring to a meeting the night before involving White House officials and Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Tex.), the two co-authors of the permanent CR.

By May 22, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle was saying that "there are many consequential problems in terms of negotiations," one of which is the CR, but another is a law-enforcement provision which Attorney General Janet Reno has recommended be vetoed. Daschle added that he was becoming "increasingly pessimistic that we're not going to be able to finish our work, which would be a travesty."