

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Anti-labor bill blocked by Senate Democrats

On Sept. 14, Senate Democrats blocked an attempt by the Republican leadership to bring up the so-called "Truth in Employment Act," a bill denounced by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney as "a blatant attempt to erode workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively for a better standard of living and a better future for their children." A cloture motion to end debate and proceed to the bill failed by a vote of 52-42, eight votes short of the required 60.

Tim Hutchinson (R-Ark.), the sponsor of the bill, said that it inserts a provision into the National Labor Relations Act "establishing that an employer is not required to hire a person seeking employment for the primary purpose of furthering the objectives of an organization other than that of the employer." He said that that provision is targeted at the union practice of "salting," where a union organizer gets a job in a non-union shop for the purpose of organizing its employees.

Hutchinson said that "salting" is used by unions to destroy non-union firms through harassment, workplace disruptions, and legal assault, if an employer refuses to hire a "salt," and if he does hire him, tries to fire him for disrupting the workplace. He claimed that the bill is not anti-labor and, in fact, still protects the rights of employee self-organization and collective bargaining.

Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) called the bill "the latest in a long series of Republican anti-labor, anti-union, anti-worker initiatives." The broad language of the bill "undermines the rights of workers to organize to improve their jobs and also infringes on a wide array of other legitimate activities that are important to all Americans," he said. Further, it "legitimizes

discrimination of the most offensive type," because it encourages employers to refuse to hire anyone they believe "might push an agenda in the workplace the employer doesn't like." He said that, under current law, employers are not powerless in the face of abuses, as Republicans claim.

### Obey slams GOP for shutdown threat

On Sept. 18, the House and the Senate both passed, without any dissenting votes, a continuing resolution that will keep the government funded until Oct. 9, if Congress does not finish work on the 13 appropriations bills by Sept. 30. President Clinton has indicated he will sign the resolution. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.) told the House, "It is likely that all 13 of the regular appropriations bills will, unfortunately, not be enacted by the end of the fiscal year on Oct. 1."

The ranking minority member on the Appropriations Committee, David Obey (D-Wisc.), attributed the delay to a confrontationalist attitude on the part of Republicans. Last year, there was considerable bipartisan cooperation to get the appropriations process finished, but "this year, we have had much more of a mindset of confrontation on at least half of the appropriations bills" that the House has considered, he said. Obey described the roadblocks that have been blocking passage, including a Labor-Health and Human Services bill "so extreme," that even the Senate won't touch it, and an Agriculture Appropriations bill in which the Republicans are failing to deal with the farm crisis.

"I would say," Obey said, that "it appears to me that this Congress has

done an extensive job of investigating but a pitiful job of legislating when it comes to meeting the primary responsibility this Congress has this year." He implicitly accused the GOP leadership of planning to send a catch-all omnibus spending bill "on a take it or leave it basis." He said he hoped this wasn't true, because "we do not need a situation to be developed where the Congress tries to take advantage of what the majority party may see as the perceived weakening of the President's position and use that to try to ram at him and stick in his ear a whole range of outrageous propositions that they know he is certainly not willing to accept, as we are not willing to accept."

### Drug control bills clear House

On Sept. 16, the House passed two bills aimed at controlling drugs, one focussing on overseas eradication and interdiction, and the other at domestic demand reduction.

The first, the Western Hemisphere Drug Elimination Act, was described by Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) as "the blueprint for reasserting U.S. dominance over drug traffickers and permanently shutting down the international drug-trafficking cartels." The bill provides additional resources for maritime and airborne surveillance by the Coast Guard and the Customs Service, and for six Blackhawk helicopters and the upgrading of 50 Huey helicopters for the Colombian National Police.

The second, the Drug Demand Reduction Act, provides, as described by Rob Portman (R-Ohio), for new initiatives to keep drugs out of schools and workplaces, and requires the Director of the Office of National Drug Control

Policy to "further streamline the Federal anti-drug bureaucracy, which is currently spread over 54 different agencies and departments."

Both bills passed with large bipartisan majorities, but there were aspects that drew criticism. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) complained that the Republicans bypassed the committee process by bringing both bills to the floor only days after they were introduced. Also, he said, "the open attacks on the administration in the findings section are . . . intentionally incendiary and unhelpful." He expressed concern about where the \$2.3 billion authorized by the drug interdiction measure would come from. "We cannot bankrupt those domestic programs geared toward reducing drug demand at the same time that we seek to do interdiction," he said.

## **Social Security subject of renewed battle**

The House Ways and Means Committee marked up two bills on Sept. 17, to implement what committee chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.) calls his "90-10" plan: 90% of the ten-year projected \$1.6 trillion budget surplus is to be used to bolster the Social Security trust fund, and the other 10% is to pay for about \$80 billion in tax cuts over the next five years.

The two bills implement the marching orders given to the House GOP leadership by the so-called Congressional Advisory Board, only a week earlier. The board, made up of former Reagan and Bush administration officials, demanded a 10% tax cut this year, and much deeper cuts next year. In a press conference the day before the markup, Archer ideologically argued, "The only way to prevent the politicians from spending money is to

take it away from them before they have a chance to waste it." The plan includes increasing the non-taxable amounts of savings, and eliminating the so-called marriage penalty and health insurance deduction for small businesses and farmers.

The ranking minority member on the committee, Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), issued a statement before Archer's press conference had even ended, slamming the plan because it takes tax proposals that the Democrats support, and have already proposed, "in such a way that they pay for them by violating the Social Security trust fund." Rangel charged that the Republican attack has so weakened Social Security's finances already, that "by introducing a tax bill paid for by taking money away from Social Security, they are pitting old against young and sowing conflict between generations."

In the Senate, the day before Archer unveiled his plan, Kennedy called the House GOP plan an "Election Eve vote-buying scheme," and told the Senate that the projected surplus in the budget comes entirely from the Social Security trust fund, and that those funds are required to pay future obligations.

While the House is expected to pass the bill on Sept. 24 or 25, it faces an uncertain future in the Senate and a veto threat from President Clinton.

## **House passes Foreign Ops Appropriations bill**

The House passed the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill on Sept. 17, with only \$3.5 billion for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and no money for implementing the 1994 framework agreement with North Korea, both of which were major sources

of bickering during floor debate on the bill. Also a subject of debate was U.S. aid policy toward Azerbaijan, given the great oil wealth of the Caspian Sea region. The bill, as reported, lifted U.S. aid sanctions against Azerbaijan, but that provision was removed from the bill by an amendment, on the grounds that Azerbaijan is continuing its economic blockade against Armenia.

The bill attaches conditions to any U.S. money provided to the IMF, including that any country receiving IMF funds must liberalize its trade consistent with international trade treaties, eliminate the practice of government-directed lending, and guarantee nondiscriminatory treatment in insolvency proceedings between domestic and foreign creditors.

Democrats, whether or not they supported additional IMF money, complained that they were not being given an opportunity to debate the IMF funding level or how it operates, because the Rules Committee rejected all 12 amendments to the bill dealing with the IMF that were put before it. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said, "It is an insult to the American people that this body cannot have a debate on a subject of grave concern, that is the economic stability of the world." Pelosi warned that "it is really unfair to the members," to consider putting in an additional \$14.5 billion for the IMF into the bill in conference, as the GOP leadership is reportedly considering doing.

Democrats also defended the framework agreement with North Korea. Pelosi said that the agreement "provides the only basis for U.S. access to troublesome sites in Korea. Ending the program eliminates any possibility of ending North Korea's nuclear ballistic missile programs and may, in fact, jeopardize the security of U.S. troops in the region."