

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### **M**edicine, food should not be used as weapons

Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Wash.) argued forcefully that agricultural commodities and medicines should not be included in economic sanctions except under the most compelling of circumstances, in a House Agriculture Committee hearing on June 9. He is the sponsor of a bill that "will allow sanctions to be removed on all countries on which they currently exist as it relates to food and medicine." The bill was introduced as an amendment to the agriculture spending bill the day before, but he withdrew it before it came to a vote.

Not only is "using food as a weapon" not the right policy, Nethercutt said, but also "lifting sanctions is clearly consistent with a free market approach," which would make taxpayer-funded assistance to farmers unnecessary. He told the committee, "I am hard pressed to conclude that any country, whether it's Iran, Iraq, or any other terrorist regime, is going to shoot grain back at Americans. . . . If we deal with these countries in an open fashion, export our agricultural commodities to them, the American farmer benefits and the people of these countries benefit as well."

Earl Pomeroy (D-N.D.) praised Nethercutt for his leadership on this issue, but he pointed out inconsistencies within the GOP caucus. The day before the hearing the agriculture spending bill passed, but only after the GOP leadership agreed with a group of conservatives led by Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) to cut \$102 million from the bill. On the same day as the hearing, House International Relations Committee Chairman Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) announced that he was going to move a bill that would prohibit any aid to North Korea unless that country proves it is dismantling its nuclear

weapons programs.

Nethercutt acknowledged that it is a difficult issue. "We have to force this issue," he said. "The taxpayers are paying to send food aid to North Korea. . . . So, my argument is, let's let them purchase the food." He said, "I think we've got to have an ag policy that's clear, and we've got to get this food where it ought to be, and we have to just be pushing the Democrats and Republicans alike." Pomeroy expressed confidence that Gilman's bill can be defeated if members from agricultural districts "stand together."

### **C**linton blasts GOP for blocking HMO reform

President Clinton called on the Congressional GOP leadership to pass an all-inclusive Patients' Bill of Rights, in his weekly radio address on June 12. "Until Congress acts," he said, "tens of millions of Americans in managed care are still waiting for the full protection of a Patients' Bill of Rights." While Republicans have acknowledged the poor quality of managed care, "the Republican leadership's legislation falls far short of providing American families the protections they need in a changing health care system," he said.

The President's call is the latest salvo in a battle building up over managed care reform, and not all the attacks on HMOs are coming from Democrats. On June 7, Greg Ganske (R-Iowa) called on the GOP leadership to pass his managed care reform bill, or one like it. "We have a situation in this country," he said, "where even if you are paying a lot of money for your insurance, you are getting turned down because your HMO arbitrarily declares this is not medically necessary." He compared the injuries that can be

caused by the decisions of an HMO, to what can happen to victims of criminal acts. "Health plans that recklessly deny needed medical service should be made to answer for their conduct," he said, just as is someone who commits murder or malicious assault.

On June 10, House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) removed primary responsibility on the issue from the House Commerce Committee and gave it to the Education and the Workforce Committee, chaired by Bill Goodling (R-Pa.). Goodling and John Boehner (R-Ohio) are sponsors of a bill similar to the one passed by the House last year, that provides for an external review process. It excludes the liability language favored by Ganske, Charlie Norwood (R-Ga.), Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) (all of whom are physicians), and Democrats. Norwood, who is a member of both committees, had been focussing his lobbying efforts on the Commerce Committee, but now vows to build support on the education panel for his bill.

### **K**osovo dominates Defense bill debate

On June 8, the Senate passed the Defense Appropriations bill by a vote of 93-4. The bill includes a 4.8% pay raise for military personnel, adds \$598 million above the President's request for operations and maintenance accounts, and increases procurement spending by \$2.7 billion and research and development by \$2.1 billion.

There were two amendments on reconstruction in the Balkans, both of which passed by voice vote and neither of which attracted much debate. The first, sponsored by Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), prohibited use of funds authorized in the supplemental spending bill

for long-term reconstruction without specific authorization of Congress. Gregg said that he was worried that the United States would end up paying a "disproportionate cost" of the reconstruction of Kosovo and Yugoslavia. "It is my opinion," he said, "that no American funds should be spent for the reconstruction of Yugoslavia until [Slobodan] Milosevic is removed as its leader." The second, offered by Ted Stevens (R-Ak.) on behalf of Don Nickles (R-Okla.), prohibits the use of any funds for reconstruction of Serbia as long as Milosevic is in power.

## **F**ight breaks out over nominations

President Clinton's appointment of California businessman James Hormel as U.S. Ambassador to Luxembourg has become a lightning rod in the battle over Presidential nominations. Clinton originally nominated Hormel for the post in 1997, and the nomination was favorably reported by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but it has since been held up by Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), who objects to Hormel's homosexual activism. Clinton, using his constitutional authority, then made the appointment during the Memorial Day recess. When the Senate came back from recess, Inhofe announced that he would put holds on all pending nominations, as Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) did in 1985 to object to the way then-President Reagan used recess appointments.

On June 9, the day after Inhofe's tirade, Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said he was "extremely concerned" about Inhofe's action, and said that it is "unacceptable" because it leaves more than 150 nominees languishing in committee. The next day,

White House Chief of staff John Podesta sent a letter to Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) taking issue with Inhofe's assertion that Byrd's action in 1985 resulted in anything close to what Inhofe is demanding, which is no appointments during recesses that last less than 30 days. Podesta wrote that, since Hormel would easily be approved if his nomination went to the full Senate, the issue is "about a very small number of Senators who believe that sexual orientation can disqualify an exceptional nominee from confirmation."

There are indications that Inhofe does not have the full support of the GOP caucus. The Foreign Relations Committee and the Finance Committee went ahead and scheduled hearings on the nominations of Richard Holbrooke as UN Ambassador and Lawrence Summers as Treasury Secretary, respectively. John McCain (R-Ariz.) told NBC's Tim Russert on Meet the Press on June 13, that appointing ambassadors is a consequence of elections. "We should go ahead and leave that issue alone," he said, "and either approve or deny [nominees] by votes, as is the proper procedure."

## **C**ox recommendations approved by House

Alleged Chinese theft of U.S. nuclear secrets dominated House debate on the Fiscal Year 2000 Defense Authorization bill. The House approved unanimously an amendment based largely on the conclusions of the Cox-Dicks committee report, and the bill itself was voted up on June 10 by a vote of 365-58.

The amendment places several onerous requirements on the administration, including on the launching of U.S. satellites on Chinese rockets,

higher-level reviews of countermeasures against Chinese technology acquisition, and reporting on Chinese compliance with the Missile Technology Control Regime. It requires negotiation of new technology control regimes "so that when the United States controls an export," said Chris Cox (R-Calif.), we do not go it alone and we find that only our producers and our workers are injured with no national security benefit," because someone else has sold the technology.

The amendment also demands an intrusive verification system for future sales of products such as high-speed computers, "as a condition for export licensing and the continued sale" of high-speed computers. Also included in the amendment, is a demand for on-site inspections as part of an annual assessment of the national security implications of such sales. "We need to have end-use verification without notice," Cox said, "negotiated simply as a term of trade, not in any way calling into question the national sovereignty of the P.R.C."

Even more ominous, is another amendment, sponsored by House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), which prohibits military-to-military exchanges between the United States and China. In a rabid speech, DeLay said that the role of the U.S. military "is to defend America from the hostile foreign powers, not to train them," which is "suicidal national behavior." This was disputed by Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), who said that DeLay's amendment was unnecessary, and that U.S.-China military exchanges are more beneficial to the United States than to China. "Routine senior level defense contact in times of relative calm can help ensure open communications during times of tension," he said. DeLay's amendment passed by a vote of 284-143.