

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Aviation Security Passes Senate, Stalls In House

On Oct. 11, the Senate passed an aviation security bill by a vote of 100-0, the central feature of which is the Federalization of 28,000 airport security workers. The bill, as passed, would put responsibility for baggage and passenger screening in the hands of the Justice Department. It includes provisions for strengthening cockpit doors, putting more air marshals on airline flights, and Federalizing airport perimeter security. The bill also establishes a Deputy Secretary of Transportation for Security.

The unanimous vote doesn't reflect the tortuous path the bill took to final passage, however. One issue that slowed down the bill was GOP complaints that Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) had no intention of taking up energy policy in this session; they tried to force the energy issue before they would allow the aviation security bill to come to the floor. However, they couldn't get past John McCain (R-Ariz.), who worked closely on the bill with Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Chairman Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.).

Once the bill came to the floor, the Republicans blocked an amendment by Jean Carnahan (D-Mo.) that would have provided aid to airline and airport workers who have lost their jobs since Sept. 11. Carnahan withdrew the amendment after it came up four votes short of the 60 needed in a cloture vote.

The bill's trials haven't ended, however. After the Senate vote, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Don Young (R-Ak.) said that he has no intention of considering the Senate bill in his committee. Instead, he said that he will be introducing his own version, supported by the House GOP leadership. Instead of Federalizing airport screen-

ing, his bill would create a "public-private" partnership between the Federal government and private security companies. He claimed that this is the "successful" model used in Europe.

House Democrats aren't satisfied with that approach, however. On Oct. 16, Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) said that the information used by the GOP to justify their proposal was provided by a representative of the private security companies. He accused the GOP of taking a "blinding ideological position" against passenger screeners being Federal law enforcement agents.

### House Committee Passes Stimulus Package

On Oct. 12, the House Ways and Means Committee passed a bill which is an attempt to keep the global financial bubble going a while longer. The \$100 billion bill, masquerading as an "economic stimulus bill," reduces the capital gains tax rate from 20% to 18%, increases the business deduction for capital losses from \$3,000 to \$5,000, and provides a tax rebate for workers who did not earn enough in 2000 to receive the \$300-600 checks that went out earlier this year. It also repeals the corporate alternative minimum tax, and includes \$21 billion in international tax breaks which would benefit companies such as Citigroup and insurance giant American International Group. Committee Chairman Bill Thomas (R-Calif.) claimed that the bill provides incentives for firms to buy equipment and facilities to spur production.

The bill came out of the committee on a 23-14 party-line vote after Democrats failed to include measures such as extended unemployment insurance benefits and a subsidy for health insurance for workers who have lost their

jobs since Sept. 11. Both measures were rejected on party-line votes. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) told reporters that the bill did not represent a bipartisan compromise. "I'm disappointed that the House is going off on all of its tangents once again," he said. "I think the President is prepared to work with us, and I think at some point we're going to have to demonstrate a capacity for working through these issues."

However, the bill is larger than what President George Bush had originally asked for. Earlier in October, Bush had specified a package of \$60-75 billion, all in the form of tax cuts. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer indicated on Oct. 16, that Bush is confident that a bill will eventually emerge from conference committee that can get bipartisan support, that will be "big enough to provide a boost to the economy, but not so big that it has any impact on long-term [interest] rates."

### Anthrax Incident Disrupts Congressional Business

On Oct. 15, an envelope containing what was later to be confirmed as anthrax spores was opened in the Senate office of Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.). Daschle was apparently not in the office at the time, but 31 people did test positive for exposure, including two people from Sen. Russ Feingold's (D-Wisc.) office, which is next door to Daschle's. The following day, Capitol Police closed an entire wing of the Hart Senate Office Building, where Daschle's office is located, and all staffers from those offices and 12 Senators were being given preventive antibiotic treatments.

The question was raised as to whether Congress should finish its business quickly and get out of town,

because of the increased threat which the incident represents. Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) told reporters that "there is a growing feeling that as soon as we can get our work done, that we should recess for the year." On the other hand, there's so much work to get done that the Congress would be lucky to be finished by Thanksgiving.

Daschle had a different take. He said that the notion of getting out of town "assumes that it's less dangerous somewhere else. . . . Leaving town is no longer a panacea." The Congress should "not run away from these problems, but address them, confront them, try to live our lives, do our work, and carry out our responsibilities."

On Oct. 17, House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) announced that the House would shut down for complete environmental screening, and remain closed until Oct. 23. He also said that a suspicious package had been received at his office on the fourth floor of the Capitol Building, and that the entire suite had been quarantined. Daschle then announced that the Senate office buildings would be closed on Oct. 18 and 19, also for complete screening.

## **T**rade Bill Moves Forward In House

On Oct. 9, the House Ways and Means Committee passed, by a vote of 26-13, a bill to give President George Bush fast track trade negotiating authority. The bill includes goals for labor and environmental standards and mandates the creation of a Congressional consulting group, which would act as advisers to U.S. trade negotiators. The bill was introduced on Oct. 3 by Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas (R-Calif.); included among

its co-sponsors were a number of Democrats, chiefly of the "Third Way" variety. This gave the bill the veneer of bipartisanship, now seen as essential in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks.

The Democrats that count, however, oppose the bill. In a joint statement, Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and Sander Levin (D-Mich.), both free-traders, complained that the Thomas bill "does not meet the test of broad bipartisanship especially necessary during this challenging period for our country." They introduced a Democratic alternative which goes much further than the Thomas bill, making the International Labor Organization's core labor standards the objective to negotiate for, as well as stronger environmental standards. House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) said, on Oct. 4, that he didn't think the trade issue "is at the top of anybody's list as what we need to do right now to address the problems from Sept. 11."

While the bill seems likely to pass the House, its fate in the Senate remains a question mark. On Oct. 16, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) told reporters that he would put trade promotion legislation in the same category as energy legislation. In other words, he'll put it on the schedule when emergency-related and appropriations legislation is all taken care of.

## **S**pending Bills Blocked Over Judicial Nominations

The appropriations process ground to a halt on Oct. 15, when Senate Republicans succeeded, in a procedural vote, in preventing consideration of the fiscal year 2002 Foreign Operations appropriations bill. The GOP has grown

dissatisfied with the pace at which judicial nominations are being processed. So far this year, the Senate has confirmed only eight judges out of 60 nominated; there are 109 vacancies in the Federal court system. Republicans are threatening to halt floor action on all types of legislation until more nominations are moved.

Such tactics are angering Democrats. Majority Whip Harry Reid (D-Nev.) warned Republicans, "All of the cajoling and threatening they do on the other side will not get them any more judges." He claimed that the holdup on nominations emanated from the Executive branch, which is moving slowly on background investigations and other paperwork required before the Judiciary Committee can even hold hearings.

In contrast, the process is working remarkably smoothly in the House. On Oct. 11, the House passed by a vote of 373-43 a bill that funds the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education departments. As David Obey (D-Wisc.) pointed out, this is only the second time in seven years that a bipartisan Labor-HHS bill has passed the House. On Oct. 17, the House also passed conference reports on the Interior Department and Military Construction bills. The House has passed 12 of 13 bills, whereas the Senate has passed eight.

## **P**elosi Elected House Democratic Whip

On Oct. 11, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) became the highest ranking woman in Congressional history when she defeated Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), by a vote of 118-95, to become the next Democratic whip. She will replace Rep. David Bonior (D-Mich.), who is stepping down in January to run for governor of Michigan.