

Congressional Calendar by Barbara Dreyfuss and Susan Kokinda

Carter forces through rail deregulation

The Carter administration has strongarmed the House into adding railroad deregulation to earlier administration victories in deregulating the airline and trucking industries. By a vote of 83 to 296 on Sept. 9, the House defeated an amendment to the Rail Act (HR 7235) offered by Rep. Bob Eckhardt (D-Tex.) that would have maintained a necessary minimum regulation over railroads.

At issue was whether areas served by a single rail line would continue to be protected from exorbitant price hikes by Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) ratemaking. On July 24, Eckhardt had successfully pushed through, by a handful of votes, an amendment maintaining that protection. The bill's sponsor, Rep. James Florio (D-N.J.), then withdrew the bill, claiming that Eckhardt's amendment would effectively kill deregulation.

But when Jimmy Carter announced two weeks ago that "rebuilding the nation's railroads" is a crucial component in his "reindustrialization" scheme, it became clear that he would press for the rail act in order to begin rationalization of this sector. The administration ordered the bill's sponsors to draft a compromise which would merely phase in deregulation over a four-year period. The administration also launched a major lobbying campaign of a magnitude seldom seen this year.

Eckhardt and a variety of lobbyists continued to oppose the compromise, charging that it was

"specious," and attempted to amend the compromise itself. Eckhardt argued that "with my amendment [utility] consumers would realize about \$5 billion a year in savings . . . [otherwise] no railroad's monopoly rate may be contested."

The Short-Line Railroad Association, fighting the bill, also stated that "there are endless examples of the methods by which large railroads can injure the small railroads using these [the bill's] powers."

After the defeat of the amendment, final passage on the bill came with a 337 to 20 vote. The legislation now goes to a House-Senate conference, where an administration-sanctioned version is expected to emerge for the President to sign into law.

Committee rejects probe on Stealth leaks

By a vote of 20 to 10, the House Armed Services Committee Sept. 9 rejected a move to require the White House to supply documentation on its decision to declassify the Pentagon's Stealth technology. The previous week Investigations Subcommittee chairman Sam Stratton (D-N.Y.) blasted Defense Secretary Harold Brown and the White House for their decision to declassify the existence of Stealth, allegedly a method of making manned bombers invisible to radar. Allegations were also raised at those hearings that the administration had leaked information itself to the press about Stealth, in order to bolster its poor image in defense matters.

However, Stratton himself voted against the resolution sponsored by Rep. James Courter (R-N.J.). Stratton said it would be a "waste of time" to try to penetrate the executive privilege obstacle that the White House would erect.

Senate Republicans failed on Sept. 8 in a similar appeal to John Stennis (D-Miss.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Stennis stated that although he would have preferred that the administration not declassify Stealth, a congressional probe might end up revealing more secrets.

House ambushes strip mining bill

Using some tricks of the trade, the House leadership has stymied Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd's (D-W.Va.) efforts to weaken the tough laws regulating strip mining. Last year Byrd pushed through the Senate a bill freeing states from federal regulations in developing strip mine reclamation plans. The bill was sent to the House Interior Committee, where Moe Udall (D-Ariz.), an environmentalist supporter, kept it bottled up.

This year Senator Byrd attached an amendment on the strip mining laws to a noncontroversial bill on vessel tonnage, with the expectation that the House Merchant Marine Committee would review it and not Rep. Moe Udall's Interior Committee. But House Speaker Tip O'Neill (D-Mass.) asked for a conference with the Senate on the bill to work out the differences between the two versions, and O'Neill named Udall to head it. As the

majority of the House conference committee members, O'Neill also appointed representatives who favor strong controls on strip mining.

Although the bill is now under Udall's control, and thus will not move, reports are that Byrd might try some maneuvers as the current legislative session draws to a close. When key legislation is stalled, Byrd might offer to help them move if his strip mining bill does too.

Nominee to spark Iran interrogation?

Hearings on the nomination of Henry Precht as ambassador to Mauritania were postponed Sept. 10 by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Intelligence sources reported that Precht's previous service as head of the Iran Desk at the State Department may become an issue. Republicans are reported ready to use Precht's nomination hearing as a forum for drawing him out on the subject of the Carter administration's role in allowing the Khomeini regime to come to power.

House demands White House Billygate records

By a voice vote the House of Representatives demanded Sept. 10 that the White House supply all documents and records involving the Billy Carter affair within seven days. The vote successfully preempted Republican efforts to postpone the vote to Oct. 1, when it could be more politically embarrassing.

After House Democrats failed to kill the Republican-sponsored resolution by a vote of 260 to 124, they apparently adopted a strategy to end the affair as quickly as possible. House Judiciary Committee chairman Peter Rodino (D-N.J.) pointed out that most of the documents have already been supplied by the administration.

This Democratic strategy of attempting to air and quickly end the Billy Carter affair is also being pursued in the Senate. Sources report that barring any new revelations, the chairman of the special committee reviewing the Billy Carter material, Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.), will move to wrap up the investigation sometime after Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Council director, testifies the week of Sept. 15. On a party-line basis, Bayh will probably have the votes.

Senate votes up Tenn-Tom, again

The Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, a barge canal that will provide easy access to the coal-producing regions of western Kentucky and Tennessee to the Gulf of Mexico, received Senate backing for the second time this year in a vote on Sept. 10. By a vote of 53 to 36 the Senate rejected an amendment put forward by Sen. John Chaffee (R-R.I.) to kill funding for the project for next year. Earlier this year, when Chaffee proposed an identical amendment to the FY 80 Supplemental Appropriation Bill, it was less forcefully rejected.

Since that earlier vote, both sides in the battle over Tenn-Tom

have escalated their lobbying efforts. Opponents of Tenn-Tom gained the advantage of having Sen. Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) ascend to the chairmanship of the Water Resources Subcommittee of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in the shake-up following Edmund Muskie's departure for the State Department. Moynihan, a vociferous opponent of Tenn-Tom who has called the project a "federal government effort to clone the Mississippi River," has used the subcommittee to hold hearings airing the views of opponents of the Tenn-Tom project. In addition Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wisc.), chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, had commissioned a GAO report on how much would be saved by stopping the project, which is already two-thirds completed.

Supporters of the Tenn-Tom fought back. In an unusual move the Water Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee released on Sept. 9 a 43-page rebuttal of arguments used against the canal. The report further charged that the railroad industry has whipped up opposition to the project because it wants to avoid competition. Subcommittee chairman Bennett Johnston (D-La.) and subcommittee member John Stennis (D-Miss.) are two of Tenn-Tom's biggest supporters. Stennis argued: "We need development, we need expansion."

One of the leading environmentalists opposed to the project, Marion Edey, head of the League of Conservation Voters and Club of Rome member, declared, "We will kill it I think in a year."