

Congressional Closeup by William Jones and Carl Osgood

Leahy pushes population control measures

Sen. Pat Leahy (D-Vt.), in the third of a series of speeches on foreign aid reform on the Senate floor on March 19, argued that "sustainable growth" should be among the goals of a redefined foreign aid policy.

Among the so-called specific U.S. national interests that are to be served by foreign assistance, he listed "a healthy global environment in which natural resources are used wisely and the world's population is in balance with the ability to support it." Sounding like he was quoting from the infamous 1974 Kissinger National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM-200) on population control as a weapon of U.S. national security, Leahy claimed that only "an aid program that protects the global environment, curbs runaway international population growth, promotes democracy and human rights, and stimulates sustainable economic growth with equity will advance our own national well-being."

Leahy blamed the problems of Africa on "corrupt rulers," pinpointing Somalia, Zaire, Liberia, and Sudan as nations afflicted with dictatorships that were supported by U.S. foreign aid during the 1980s. These nations have collapsed, Leahy claimed, because of "their failure to build stable political institutions and sustainable economies."

Leahy failed to mention that Sudan is in fact self-sufficient in food and potentially capable of becoming a major food exporter.

"Our natural environment," he continued, "is inseparable from the global environment. The destruction of the Earth's remaining forests, most of which are located on other continents where exploding populations are destroying the natural resource base, threatens to dramatically change our own climate." He singled out India in this respect. The solution lies,

according to Leahy, in stronger international controls. "If, working with the international community, we cannot stop global warming, pollution of the air and water, destruction of the world's biodiversity, and the unsustainable exploitation of the world's natural resources, our standard of living and the lives of our children and grandchildren will suffer," he said.

Clinton budget resolution passes Senate and House

The broad outline of President Clinton's budget package has passed both houses of Congress. The actual cuts have yet to be determined, however, and in these matters, the devil is always in the detail.

On March 18, the House passed the budget resolution by a vote of 243-183. The Clinton package would cut the deficit by \$510 billion, but only by introducing a major tax increase and cuts in defense and other spending. In a compromise with Democrats who were opposed to any stimulus package, the White House agreed to separate the stimulus package from the budget resolution itself, but without backing off on either. The stimulus package was passed by the House in a 235-190 vote on March 19, over the opposition of the "austerity Democrats" led by Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.). "The President is a very powerful lobbyist," said Stenholm. "We struck out."

The House had earlier rejected an alternative budget resolution by Rep. John Kasich (R-Ohio), the ranking Republican on the House Budget Committee, which would reduce the deficit, but only with budget cuts. It also rejected an alternative offered by the Congressional Black Caucus that would have cut defense spending even more than the Clinton proposal to

boost domestic spending.

Clinton's stimulus package is proving to be much tougher to get through the Senate, where Democrats have a smaller majority. On March 18, the Senate defeated an amendment to the Clinton proposal which would have knocked out the proposed energy tax. Three Democratic senators, David Boren (Okla.), Bob Krueger (Tex.), and Richard Shelby (Ala.), voted for the amendment. The Senate passed the budget resolution on March 25 in a 54-45 vote with only two Democrats, Shelby and Krueger, voting against.

A vote on the stimulus package has been held up by the opposition of senators Boren and John Breaux (D-La.). Despite a successful attempt by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) to work out a compromise, Sen. Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.) suddenly announced on March 29 that he would oppose it.

Environmentally tough NAFTA sought by Baucus

In remarks on the Senate floor on March 26, Max Baucus (D-Mont.) called for toughening the environmental provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement. "NAFTA gives us the chance to move toward a new era in international relations, an era in which trade relations reflect ecological realities," claimed Baucus. "We can use NAFTA to protect and encourage sound environmental practices."

Baucus endorsed the creation of a North American Commission on the Environment (NACE), currently the subject of NAFTA side negotiations, since "trade rules are the only global controls on economic development." A NACE agreement would effectively impose stringent environmental stan-

dards on the Mexicans, which Baucus, in a commentary in the March 18 *Washington Post*, characterized as "an iron fist in a velvet glove." Baucus was seconded by Sen. David Durenberger (R-Minn.), who said that "from an environmental perspective, NAFTA is the best trade agreement ever brought to the Senate."

Nunn tries to stanch defense spending cuts

In an attempt to prevent further cuts in defense spending, Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) authored an amendment which would effectively prevent the Clinton administration from transferring funds from defense to other categories of spending. Fourteen conservative Democrats joined 42 Republicans on March 23 to pass the non-binding resolution, which was then passed as a part of the budget resolution package.

The Nunn amendment stipulates that any additional defense savings over and above those presented in the budget resolution must go toward reducing the deficit rather than financing other domestic programs.

Senate defeats GOP bid to stop Clinton energy tax

The Senate voted 53-46 on March 18 to reject a Republican attempt to eliminate President Clinton's proposed BTU energy tax, as well as the new spending the tax was intended to pay for.

Although the administration had announced that the energy tax would not be applied to ethanol (a concession to farm states, whose leaders perceive their economies to be heavily dependent on ethanol and ethanol products),

the exemption was rejected by the Senate in a vote of 52-48 on March 24. The exemption had been strongly supported by the grain cartel lobby, headed by the Illinois-based Archer Daniels Midland Co., and opposed by environmental groups, which want all forms of energy taxed except those considered "benign and renewable," such as solar power or wind power.

Abstention issue heats up on Capitol Hill

The House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice gave its support to a bill (H.R. 796) which would make it a federal crime to block entry to a "family planning" clinic. The legislation, sponsored by subcommittee chairman Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Connie Morella (R-Md.), would also allow women and clinic operators to obtain a federal court injunction against pro-life demonstrators who unlawfully blockade clinics.

In discussions with congressional staff on March 19, Justice Department aides had pushed for an even broader measure that would bar any interference with or threats to doctors and other medical personnel. Rep. Tim Hutchinson (R-Ark.) called the measure an attack on the Constitution. "This bill would have a severe impact on those who seek to peacefully protest," Hutchinson remarked in comments on the House floor on March 17. "And that is the true agenda behind H.R. 796. Picket a coal mine—go right ahead. Rally outside a college administration building—it's your right. Hold AIDS funding signs outside the Department of Health and Human Services—that's what freedom is all about. But dare to protest the taking of unborn life—go straight to jail."

In related moves, the House ap-

proved by a vote of 273-149 on March 25 legislation which would lift the ban on abortion counseling at family planning clinics that receive federal funds. On the same day, the House also defeated an amendment which would prohibit federally funded clinics from performing abortions on minors unless a parent is notified 48 hours in advance.

Johnston introduces fusion energy bill

Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-La.) introduced into the Senate on March 24 a bill to redirect the Department of Energy's fusion research program toward the development of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), a fusion demonstration reactor.

The United States has already entered into agreement with Japan, Russia, and the European Community to develop the ITER. Johnston's bill would restructure the DOE's research, now divided between magnetic fusion and inertial confinement fusion, to focus the magnetic fusion program on the ITER. The ITER, said Johnston, which is expected to take seven years to construct after the design is completed in 1996, "is expected to embody most of the features of a fusion power plant." ITER is being designed to produce 1,000 megawatts of energy, and would help to "demonstrate the scientific and technical feasibility of magnetic fusion energy and to prove that a sustained fusion reaction can be maintained at an energy level sufficient to generate electricity in commercial quantities.

"We are at a critical juncture for the magnetic fusion program," Johnston said. "It is time for the United States to . . . work with the international community to complete this project."