

## Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

### Daschle Opposed Extending Transportation Bill

With the Sept. 30 expiration of the 1997 Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century looming, the scramble has begun to keep existing transportation programs going while Congress haggles over a new six-year authorization bill. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Don Young (R-Ak.), on Sept. 16, introduced legislation to extend the TEA 21 programs by five months. It would maintain the existing programs, including keeping user fees firewalled from the rest of the budget. Young promised that his committee would pass a \$375 billion TEA 21 renewal package before the end of the year.

Democrats, however, were not especially happy with the extension, and called for action on the renewal bill. Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.), in a statement inserted into the *Congressional Record*, said, "I have been here long enough to know how the cow chews the cabbage, and a delay puts us into an election year." He warned that that delay could be extended, and put the transportation planning process in his state of Michigan into jeopardy.

Dingell's concerns were echoed by Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), who told reporters that the extension could actually mean the loss of 90,000 jobs. He said that Democrats are "disappointed and don't believe that there is any likelihood that things are going to change over the course of the next five months. Sooner or later, Republicans are going to have to show us some leadership with regard to highway construction and highway commitment." He said that the fact that there's no highway bill "for the first time in decades" is unfortunate given "that we've already lost 3-plus mil-

lion jobs over the course of the last three years."

### Senate Supports Bush Outsourcing Plans

On Sept. 23, the Senate turned back an attempt, sponsored by Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), to slow down the outsourcing juggernaut that is now running through the Bush Administration. Reid had sponsored an amendment to the Interior Department appropriations bill that would have prohibited that department from expending funds to carry out competitive outsourcing studies. Reid pointed out that the Interior Department spent \$10 million on such studies last year, money that had been appropriated by the Congress for the purpose of maintaining national parks. "The Administration is bypassing Congress to implement its own agenda and is using unauthorized funds to do it," said Reid.

The Republicans responded with a defense of the Bush Administration's outsourcing agenda, and a second-degree amendment that would have required the Interior Department to provide Congress information on implementation of the outsourcing initiative. George Voinovich (R-Ohio), one of the co-sponsors of the second degree amendment, complained that there were five different amendments on five different appropriations bills dealing with outsourcing, which would constitute "an incoherent set of restrictions." The Republicans also argued that competitive sourcing saves taxpayers' money.

Responding to the Republicans' second-degree amendment, Reid returned to his original argument, that competitive sourcing studies would "siphon off" funds that are needed for national parks maintenance. He also noted that the House Appropriations

Committee, in its Interior bill, was "concerned about the massive scale of seemingly arbitrary targets and considerable costs of [outsourcing] initiatives," which Congress and the public are neither able to understand nor participate in. The Voinovich amendment passed by 53-43, but its passage was rendered moot, when the Reid amendment was defeated by 51-44.

### House Passes Do-Nothing Charitable Giving Bill

On Sept. 17, the House passed a \$13 billion tax bill advertised as "influencing in a positive way, a people's willingness to carry on contributions and charitable acts," as it was described by House Ways and Means Committee chairman Bill Thomas (R-Calif.). Thomas further described it as a response to President Bush's priority to "rally the armies of compassion, to help the underprivileged in the United States . . . to assist those in need in a private plan from those who have wealth."

The overwhelming 408-13 vote did not stop those few from speaking out against it, however. Pete Stark (D-Calif.) told the House that many members suspect that the bill will not generate much charitable giving, but it will provide giveaways to college fraternities and sororities for housing, and to the lumber industry in Washington State for experiments in forest management. John Tierney (D-Mass.) added that the \$13 billion in tax breaks in the bill will only generate a few cents per dollar that will actually go to the neediest Americans. "The need for assistance in education and health care and housing among low-income Americans is great, and, unfortunately, there is little evidence that this bill is going to do anything to address those needs," he pointed out.