

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

C **Crime bill stalled as election tactic**

In a rather contentious committee squabble, the Bush crime bill has stalled, despite calls from Democratic and Republican leaders in both houses to pass the legislation before Congress adjourns for the year. Although crime bills have passed both houses, there has been difficulty in pulling together a conference committee to iron out the differences between the two versions.

One bone of contention has involved a fight over the proportionality of representation of the two parties on the conference committee. Many Republicans also seem content to allow the bill to remain unpassed, in order to underline the crime issue and make the failure to pass crime legislation an election issue against the Democrats in the 1992 election campaign.

Although both versions of the bill contain the essential elements of the original administration proposal—a massive extension of the death penalty to cover 50 federal crimes, curbing death-row appeals to federal courts, and allowing the use of illegally seized evidence in court—Republicans are concerned by stipulations which place a waiting period on handgun purchases, a measure ardently opposed by the National Rifle Association.

C **Croatia independence resolution bottled up**

The House resolution calling for the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, introduced by Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-Calif.) on Oct. 22 and which now has over 33 cosponsors, is bottled up in the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Gallegly is convinced that if his

resolution came to the floor, the votes would be there to pass it. But the resolution must first be taken up by the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Committee Chairman Rep. Dante Fascell (D-Fla.), Europe and the Middle East Subcommittee Chairman Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), and ranking subcommittee member Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) have decided to leave the resolution on the back burner, apparently hoping that it would die a natural death.

There is growing support for the resolution from both conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats, but its passage would mean a head-on collision with the Bush administration, which refuses to recognize the independence of Croatia and Slovenia. It is generally recognized that Secretary of State James Baker III's comments during a trip to the former Yugoslavia, where he expressed the administration's desire to deal with a united Yugoslavia, helped to trigger the ongoing Serbian aggression.

A similar resolution calling for the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia has been introduced in the Senate by Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), with strong backing from Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.). The Gore resolution presently has 22 cosponsors. Gore will attempt to get a unanimous consent agreement to bring the bill directly to the floor, thereby avoiding committee action. The Gore resolution also calls for a freezing of Serbian assets in the United States.

S **Surface transportation bill agreed upon**

House and Senate negotiators agreed on Nov. 4 to a Surface Transportation

bill authorizing \$151 billion for highways and mass transit over a six-year period. The figure agreed upon was higher than the \$105 billion proposed by the administration, but a pittance compared to the nation's transportation infrastructure needs. There is also no guarantee that any of these funds will be appropriated and spent.

The legislation will in all likelihood be signed by the President, who had earlier threatened to veto the bill if it contained the proposed 5¢ per gallon gasoline tax which was to help finance the legislation. The tax was removed in conference.

S **Soviet aid proposal dropped from defense bill**

In a defeat for Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and his House counterpart, Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), a proposal to authorize the Defense Department to spend up to \$1 billion to transport and distribute surplus food, medicine, and emergency supplies to the Russian people was rejected after it became clear that President Bush would not work for its passage.

A House-Senate conference committee meeting on Nov. 13 to reconcile the different versions of the defense bill, shelved the proposal when it met with strong objections from both Republican and Democratic legislators. The legislators expressed concern at giving aid to a "former enemy" at a time of mounting needs at home. Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) labeled the measure "a golden parachute for communist airmen."

Both the administration and the Democrats were wary of being in the forefront of a major foreign aid pack-

age in the wake of a growing mood of domestic discontent over the depression. Even Democrats who believe that there will be a "peace dividend" from the major defense cuts now being implemented were not especially excited at seeing the "dividend" being spent in humanitarian aid to the Soviet Union.

Nunn attacked the "short-sightedness" of the decision, saying that lawmakers may run into more trouble for having opposed the aid if a hungry, desperate Soviet Union plunged into civil war and Soviet authorities lost effective control over their nearly 30,000 nuclear weapons. Aspin and Nunn plan to reintroduce the measure as a separate piece of legislation.

Democrats propose campaign financing cap

House Democratic leaders proposed Nov. 12 to put a cap on congressional campaign spending and to provide some public financing for congressional campaigns.

In May, the Senate had passed similar legislation, which included spending limits and public financing, and which banned political action committee contributions. President Bush has said that he would veto the Senate legislation, and Republicans have also voiced concern over the most recent proposal by House Democrats. There has been a public outcry over the influence of "special interest groups" in Washington, which provide the majority of the financing for the election campaigns of U.S. legislators, and some Democrats are attempting to use this to assert greater government control.

The growth of the movement for imposing term-limits on congressional posts, a campaign heavily backed

by the Republican Party, has also created a new sense of urgency for reforming the campaign financing process. House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.), one of the authors of the campaign spending measure, narrowly avoided being ousted by a term-limit campaign in his own state in the Nov. 5 election.

The Democratic proposal would set voluntary spending limits of \$600,000 in an election and would allow candidates to collect up to \$200,000 in public matching funds based on the amount of small contributions they collect. The measure would also limit the amount candidates can receive from political action committees to \$200,000, and would cap individual contributions at \$200.

House banking bill still in limbo

The House banking bill, now shorn of the deregulation measures wanted by the Bush administration, is having rough going even after the more controversial items were eliminated. Similarly, jittery congressmen are balking on agreeing to an additional \$80 billion for a thrift cleanup bill, which they are afraid will not meet with the approval of constituents who are angered by the already high cost of the savings and loan bailout.

The House Banking Committee made its third attempt on Nov. 19 to draft new banking legislation, after the two previous bills were defeated on the House floor. Whether or not legislators will be content to vote for a bill which does little more than pump more money into the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. remains to be seen. The proposed alternatives range between giving the Resolution Trust

Corp. \$25 billion, and giving the RTC "permanent and indefinite funding."

This conflict has created tension between the administration, which is intent on getting the additional funding, and Republican congressmen who will have to pay the political price if they agree to the new funding. President Bush urged Senate Banking Committee Chairman Donald Riegle (D-Mich.) to complete the banking legislation the same day.

House Democrats understand that the situation is placing the President in a bind. "I would like to see a tough political debate in an election year on how we are going to pay for all this," said Rep. Jim Slattery (D-Kan.). "The President of the United States has a moral obligation to tell the American people how he's going to solve the problem."

Senate extends unemployment benefits

On Nov. 15, the Senate passed 97-2 up to 20 weeks of additional unemployment benefits in the hardest-hit states for those whose 26 weeks of regular benefits have run out. On Nov. 14, the House had passed the extension on a 396-40 vote. President Bush said he will sign this extension, even though he had rejected two earlier versions saying they would cost too much.

The fight within the Senate raged over how to divide the \$5.3 billion, since the bill provided funds for as little as six weeks extra payments in state's where official statistics showed there was a smaller percentage of unemployed. The benefits will run for as many weeks as the percentage of unemployment in each state. Thus, if a state has officially 7% unemployment, extended benefits will run for seven weeks.