

Washington Report

By Congressman Walter B. Jones

The most controversial bill considered last week was a \$1 billion plus appropriation for the Department of Labor to provide jobs for part of the same 10 million people who are presently unemployed.

This bill, as passed by the House, is designed to employ people to repair streets, bridges and other publicly used facilities. This bill was sponsored by the Democrat Leadership in the House, and of course, opposed by the Republicans. Any of you who may have seen the House proceedings on cable TV will realize the bitter and sometime personal - type attack and debate that took place regarding this legislation. The Republicans had a substitute bill which they claimed would add twice as many jobs at less cost than the Democratic version. This was defeated, and after some five hours of debate, bickering, name-calling, etc., the Democratic version finally was approved. This money is to be spent within six months and is suppose to provide jobs for several hundred thousands presently unemployed people. Of course, the Senate must approve this legislation which seems somewhat unlikely, and also it must pass the scrutiny of President Ronald Reagan; all of which means that it is very unlikely that it will become law.

Several months ago I co-sponsored what I considered to be much needed legislation in that it updated and amended the present maritime laws under which our merchant marine fleet has been operating since 1916 or the past 66 years. I think all will agree that with the changes in methods of doing business, that it was time to update the maritime laws. After some three or four years of negotiating, every segment of the maritime industry, including ship builders, shippers, carriers, maritime unions, as well as the present Reagan Administration, were in support of the bill. Somewhere along the line a consumer group conceived the idea that it might possible increase the cost of goods and other imports, and mounted quite a campaign in opposition to the legislation. Before the final vote the bill had been critically attacked editorially by "The Washington Post", "The New York Times" and "The Wall Street Journal". In addition, the consumer advocate of NBC described the House action as being the American Consumer vs. the Shipping Industry. In fact, the bill actually opens up competition among shipping companies to a greater degree than now exists. For years the maritime has operated and been subjected to anti-trust laws, which, of course, always involve the Department of Justice. The bill provides for some anti-trust exemptions which do not exist at the present time. Many of us feel that by opening up the competition, contrary to the contention of some of increased cost, that actually the competition will result in decreased cost. In any event, overall, this legislation hopefully will stimulate the improvement of our merchant marine fleet, which, as I have pointed out many times, is in a rather sad state of affairs. Many others must have felt the same way, for on final passage, in spite of the critical editorials, the vote was 350 yeas against 33 nays.



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