

Story Behind the House Votes

Why the Arms Cuts Lost

Washington

An intensive personal lobbying campaign by Vice President Gerald R. Ford and Defense Secretary James Schlesinger played a key role in the stunning defeat of liberal attempts to cut the 1975 Pentagon budget on the House floor last week.

In addition, according to some congressional sources,

the politics of impeachment may have helped to cement some wavering Republican votes in favor of the \$22.6 billion arms procurement measure.

The liberal bloc, led by House majority leader Thomas P. O'Neill of Massachusetts and Representative Les Aspin (Dem-Wes.), a frequent critic of Pentagon waste, had spent weeks lin-

ing up a series of specific defense budget cuts.

But when they reached the floor in a marathon session Wednesday, it became clear from the start that Armed Services Committee Chairman F. Edward Hebert had marshaled a powerful conservative voting bloc. One by one the amendments went down to defeat.

● Representative Robert

L. Leggett (Dem-Calif.) lost a proposal to cut Trident submarine construction from two a year to one, on a voice vote.

● Representative Otis Pike (Dem-N.Y.) lost a bid to kill the Air Force B-1 supersonic bomber program, 309 to 94.

● Representative Bella Abzug (Dem-N.Y.) lost a plea to eliminate money for "silo-killer" nuclear missile warheads, 370 to 34.

● O'Neill's attempt to force a 100,000-man troop cut overseas was beaten 240 to 163.

● Leggett's motion to reduce South Vietnam arms aid to \$1 billion lost 211 to 190.

Finally, Aspin and a group of both conservative and liberal backers were beaten 209 to 185 in a bid to cut \$733 million from the overall budget.

What was odd in all this was the fact that Aspin had won a similar battle last year, and since then the mood in Congress seemed to

have shifted somewhat against the administration, particularly on the record Pentagon budget.

Aspin himself believes that an unexpected one-day delay between the general debate on the defense bill and the session in which amendments were considered gave Hebert and the administration time to conduct a blitz campaign against the liberal amendments.

That was confirmed by Representative John H. Rousselot (Rep-Calif.), a deeply conservative legislator who co-sponsored the As-

pin amendment on grounds that the Pentagon along with other federal agencies is too big, too powerful and spends too much.

Rousselot said in an interview he has been told by Republican colleagues that Ford and Schlesinger conducted a personal telephone lobbying campaign during the week.

"They put on a tremendous lobbying effort, he said. "They scared people away. We lost 15 to 20 votes on one day's time."

Rousselot does not ascribe to the theory expressed by the Democrats — sources

say that O'Neill himself subscribes to it — that Republican moderates and liberals looked at the bill with one eye on the impeachment vote now due in midsummer.

All of them face reelection in the fall and a vote for impeachment could alienate large numbers of hard-core Nixon supporters unless, as one Democrat put it, "they are damned careful to toe the conservative line on every other measure that comes up between now and then."

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