

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Dole's AIDS bill seeks to cut costs of dying

Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) and 14 Republican co-sponsors introduced the AIDS Act of 1987 on June 16, S. 1374, which avoids the issue of testing for the AIDS virus, and seeks to lower the cost of caring for those dying of AIDS.

"There are some issues we are not yet prepared to address," Dole said in introducing the bill. "Notably left unresolved are those issues relating to testing, confidentiality, and nondiscrimination."

Republicans, in particular, are divided between those, like Dole, who emphasize the civil rights of the infected, and those who stress the rights of the uninfected, as represented in a bill introduced recently by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.).

One entire section of Dole's bill is devoted to cutting the cost of care for those dying of AIDS, by moving them into home rather than hospital care. Throughout the debate on AIDS, Dole has continually referred to budget constraints. "Our bill is based on what we know to date about how our resources can best be spent," is his favorite refrain.

"One particular area where education could do a great deal of good," Dole said, "would be in helping these [health-care] providers understand the value of non-institutional care. In the case of many afflicted with AIDS, the most appropriate and humane site of care is the home rather than the hospital." Funds are provided to states to encourage home-based care.

The Dole bill would declare AIDS a public-health emergency; establish an international AIDS data bank through the National Library of Medicine, and a virus and serum bank in

the National Institutes of Health to make all virus serotypes available to qualified researchers; expedite the FDA drug approval process; and fund AIDS education programs for health-care providers and the public.

Sen. William Cohen (R-Maine), a co-sponsor, said that "AIDS is nothing short of a disaster," and that "current trends portend that this disease could overwhelm our health care system." Yet, he and other co-sponsors are unwilling to back public-health measures such as a mass testing program.

Balanced Budget amendment introduced

Following President Reagan's call for a Balanced Budget amendment to the Constitution, Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) in the Senate, and Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.) in the House, introduced identical bills to this effect on June 17.

The DeConcini-Stenholm bill, Sen. Joint Res. 161 and House Joint Res. 321, incorporates two new provisions. First, it would require that the President and the Congress reach agreement on a single revenue estimate. Second, even though Congress could decide to create a deficit, and similarly increase the debt limit, by a three-fifths vote in both House and Senate, this proposal provides for repayment of any such deficit in the following year.

In 1982 the House blocked a Balanced Budget amendment, and in 1986 the Senate defeated Sen. Joint Res. 225 by one vote (two-thirds being required for passage). Stenholm said that the new approach was designed to unite two slightly different approaches

that had been introduced in the last Congress, and introduced his bill with 233 co-sponsors. Backers are hoping to bring their bills to floor votes as early as this fall.

In motivating the bill, DeConcini expressed horror at the "downward mobility" which "the next generation may be the first in this century to experience." "Since 1970 the real per capita income for a young adult has declined by approximately one-fifth," he said. "Even the American dream of owning one's own home is being threatened."

But balanced budgets do not an economic recovery make, and the proposed amendment would only create further economic havoc. Supporters who recognize this admit that there would "have to be a transition" to a balanced budget. They argue that the amendment would put teeth back into the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit-cutting effort.

Proxmire attacks push for megabanks

Senate Banking Committee chairman Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) attacked plans to consolidate American banking into the hands of a few large banks, in a Senate floor speech on June 16 entitled, "Why America Doesn't Need Fewer and Bigger Banks."

"This country does not need just a few megabanks. We do not need bigger banks," Proxmire said. "No one can convince this senator that we can secure more competition if we reduce the number of banks and concentrate most of our financial resources in nine megabanks. Fewer banks means less competition. Yes, the big banks would be fatter, in fact much fatter. But would

they be more efficient? Not on the basis of the record."

Proxmire pointed to the fact that "our biggest banks have been among our weakest performers by the measure of the free market." Continental Illinois had to be bailed out, and Bank of America "discovered that there is a difference between bigness and success."

Proxmire said Treasury Undersecretary George Gould, an advocate of the megabank concept, "represents big money and big business at its very biggest." Nine of the 10 largest mergers in history took place last year, "but to Mr. Gould, the merger business is lagging." Now, "Gould would like Congress to promptly bring on nationwide branching, permit banks to get into the same securities, insurance, real estate businesses that have been denied American banks during the 50 years of the Glass-Steagall Act," Proxmire said. "But that is not enough. Gould also would like to push our biggest commercial and industrial firms into banking."

"Just think of it," Proxmire warned. "In this country, very big banks are not allowed to fail. . . . Does this mean the federal government will bail out Sears Roebuck and its banking subsidiary or American Express or Ford or General Motors?"

Airline safety: victim of deregulation

Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, introduced S. Res. 230 on June 10, which seeks to reduce air-traffic volume this summer in an effort to avoid a catas-

trophe. The lack of airline safety is one of the major legacies of airline deregulation, and of the 1981 air traffic controllers' strike, which led to the sacking of thousands of skilled controllers.

Lautenberg said that the May 13 recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) included that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) act to reduce the number of arrivals and departures at certain airports. He emphasized that the NTSB labeled this a "Class I, Urgent Action."

"The NTSB is flashing the red light. It's ringing the alarm. The warning could not be any louder," Lautenberg warned. "Class I, Urgent Action is the category the Board reserves for its highest priority concerns. It means that . . . an accident can occur at any time, unless preventive action is taken." He added that even control sectors which control planes in mid-journey cannot handle the load. "We face the risk of a catastrophic midair collision," he said.

Lautenberg said that the NTSB "found that what ails the air traffic system cannot be cured this summer with new technology, more runways, or additional controller candidates." "The issue isn't whether the air traffic system is foundering. It is. The issue isn't whether we can rebuild the system," Lautenberg said, "We can. But we can't overcome the effects of the 1981 strike and deregulation overnight." In its May 13 report, the NTSB also blamed deregulation for inordinate flight delays.

The air traffic system is currently being revamped and upgraded—roughly a \$16 billion program—but has been subject to several delays.

Transportation Secretary Eliza-

beth Dole recently decided to request an additional \$51.5 million for FY88 for 955 more air traffic controllers. The Department of Transportation had been claiming that there was adequate personnel for safety purposes.

Congress votes funds for 'Project Democracy'

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) an amendment to the Department of State Authorization bill, to delete funding for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), of the "Project Democracy" secret government—but the amendment went down to a 310-91 defeat on June 18.

"We need now to bring an end to the privatization of foreign policy, because it is a prescription for confusion and failure," Conyers said. "The NED takes upon itself to fund foreign political groups, foreign organizations, organizations for which we have little or no information, and groups that could embarrass our government and have embarrassed our government and made it the subject of puzzlement and ridicule."

Conyers complained, "We now have a covert division of NED in which we have secret grantees that cannot even be revealed to the Oversight Committee for audit." At the time of the oversight hearings, "88% of the grants from the NED was going to the organizations who were represented on its board."

Fewer than a dozen Republicans voted against NED this time, a fact which one Hill source attributed to the desire of the GOP to circle the wagons around the embattled President.