

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