

Congressional Closeup by Kathleen Klenetsky

Dannemeyer AIDS amendment approved

The House approved an amendment Oct. 15 which would require a proposed federal government entity to notify health-care workers about the dangers of AIDS. Sponsored by Rep. William Dannemeyer, a California Republican who has been among the most outspoken advocates of stronger measures to contain the deadly epidemic, the amendment was added to a bill that would establish a federal Risk Assessment Board, empowered to identify, notify, and prevent illness and death among workers who are at increased or high risk of occupational disease.

Dannemeyer's motion would put in this category health-care and emergency workers who are at risk of occupational exposure to AIDS. It also mandates the Risk Assessment Board to "determine the appropriate type of medical monitoring or health counseling with respect to such a population."

Dannemeyer pointed to numerous instances where health care workers have been infected with the AIDS virus, due to inadequate protection. He cited one horrifying case of a nurse at San Francisco General Hospital, who was told by hospital authorities that, in caring for AIDS patients, she could not wear gowns, masks, and gloves because this offended them. She has subsequently sued the hospital and the California Health Department for defects in her newborn son, believed to have been caused by her exposure to the AIDS virus during her pregnancy.

"I find that frankly to be wrong public-health policy," declared Dannemeyer. "Considering that we have between one and four million people who are infected with the virus, nobody knows how many, and we have

not yet adopted a national testing program to determine the extent of the virus in our society, if we do not want to have the phenomenon develop in America where the health-care workers are voting with their feet by going off their jobs, rather than exposing themselves to unnecessary risks, this is the kind of amendment we should be adopting so that our public health officials and the Department of Labor are giving notification to our health-care workers as to how they can protect themselves from getting this virus."

Major opposition to the amendment came from the stalwarts of the "AIDS lobby," including Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Rep. Joseph Gaydos (D-Pa.).

Senate passes War Powers substitute

After months of wrangling over whether to force President Reagan to apply the War Powers Act to the Persian Gulf reflagging deployment, the Senate approved a resolution Oct. 21 which puts off congressional action on the issue until next January.

The measure, co-sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) and Sen. John Warner, a Virginia Republican, requires the President to report to Congress on the situation in the Gulf within 30 days after it becomes law. Thirty days after that, the Senate would then vote whether to oppose or support the Gulf deployment. The 60-day period would not begin until the House passed the amendment, and the President signed it into law.

It endorses a U.S. military presence in the Gulf, but expresses "reservations" about the reflagging of Ku-

waiti oil tankers.

Warner called on President Reagan to approve the measure, on the grounds that it gives him a way to consult with Congress without invoking the War Powers Act. "It says, 'We support you, Mr. President, and your overall policy in the Gulf,' " Warner claimed.

Warner's characterization of the measure is far from accurate. Although it is admittedly much less of an intrusion into the President's policy-making powers—and less of a threat to the Persian Gulf deployment—than either the War Powers Act, or the Nunn-Byrd amendment offered late in the summer, it presents the threat that the Congress will indeed terminate the operation, which Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger has termed essential to protect international shipping, and to hold back Soviet incursions into the Mideast.

As Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), one of the major proponents of invoking the War Powers Act, put it, the resolution means that "the President can no longer keep Congress out of the way, and Congress has come to the realization that it does have a responsibility in matters of war and peace."

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a report in mid-October, suggesting how strong sentiment is on Capitol Hill for shutting down the U.S. escort operation. The study called for a new look at policy in the Gulf, faulting current policy for having "nebulous" goals and for inviting "more Iranian attacks of increasing severity."

It charges that the decision to reflag and protect Kuwaiti tankers was made hastily on poor rationale, and that the U.S. presence has made shipping in the Gulf less safe than before.

The report also takes issue with Weinberger's contention that growing Soviet influence in the Gulf and Mid-east generally is an immediate danger. "There is little likelihood of Soviet political encroachment among Gulf Arab states," says the report, because of their mistrust and basic differences with Moscow.

What baloney! Moderate Arab states have long feared that the United States would gradually reduce its presence in the region, creating a political and military vacuum which the Soviets would fill. That is precisely what has happened over the last decade; the reflagging operation represents a much-needed corrective to that suicidal course.

'AIDS could kill 25 million Americans'

Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) warned from the floor of the House on Oct. 15 that if the United States fails to adopt a comprehensive AIDS testing program, 25 million Americans could be dead of the disease by the year 2005—just 17 years from now.

Burton based his prediction on a new computer study conducted by Dr. Allan Salzberg, chief of the medical service at the Veterans Administration in Miles City, Montana.

The study compares how many Americans will contract AIDS, how many will die, and how much the epidemic will cost over the next 20 years, if testing and related measures are implemented, and if they are not.

Assuming that testing is not adopted, Salzberg estimates that by 2005, some 25 million Americans will die of the disease, and 43 million will be carriers. Costs will total \$8.2 trillion.

If, on the other hand, an effective testing program is put into action by 1990, Salzberg believes the AIDS pandemic could be contained, with 2 million casualties and another 2.4 to 3.3 million carriers.

Burton, co-sponsor of a mandatory AIDS testing bill now pending in Congress, warned that voluntary testing alone would be entirely inadequate. "AIDS is a pandemic, not just an epidemic," he said. "I use the analogy of the bubonic plague which wiped out half of Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries. That disease . . . became so bad that they would nail windows on houses shut and burn people alive the minute somebody said 'plague.'

"We do not want that kind of thing to happen in the United States. We want to have an orderly way to deal with this epidemic, but if it gets out of control, because we have not done the proper things today, then we are going to have a real problem on our hands, not only economically, but as far as dealing with it as a civilization."

If the United States doesn't get down to the "hard decisions" needed now, Burton warned, "we may be facing a problem that humankind has never seen in the history of this Earth."

Burton announced that he had sent copies of the Salzberg report to every office on the Hill.

House calls for Panama aid cut-off

Following in the footsteps of the U.S. Senate, the House adopted a non-binding resolution Oct. 19 urging the administration to terminate all U.S. aid to Panama, and to give the "Marcos treatment" to Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, chief of the Panamanian

Defense Forces.

The resolution is part and parcel of the State Department's attempt to overthrow Noriega, who has become a thorn in State's side, because of his nationalism and strong opposition to both IMF policies and the international drug traffic.

Like the Senate resolution, which passed 97-0, the House measure calls on the United States to cease "all economic and military assistance" and "suspend all shipments of military and spare parts" to the Panamanian government unless it meets a number of conditions, among them: ensuring "civilian control of the armed forces and the Panama Defense Forces"; removing the armed forces' leaders from "non-military activities and institutions"; and instituting a "non-military transitional government."

The resolution's chief sponsor is Mel Levine, a liberal California Democrat who usually vents his spleen on the Strategic Defense Initiative.

House backs law on special prosecutor

A measure to make permanent the law authorizing special prosecutors to investigate wrongdoing by government officials was approved by the House on Oct. 21.

The move is a blow to the administration, which had argued that the law was unconstitutional because it violates the separation of powers.

The 327-87 vote is far more than the two-thirds necessary to override a presidential veto. The Senate was expected to take up a similar measure in late October, which differs from the House bill in that it would extend the current law for five years.