

Editorial

Congress and the drug issue

When it returns to Washington in mid-September, the U.S. House of Representatives will have at the top of its agenda a broad-ranging bill on illegal drugs which, if approved, would set the guidelines for the anti-drug policy of the next administration. The bill specifies, among a wide array of measures, a larger budget for the Customs Service, the creation of an anti-drug super-department in the Cabinet, new and stronger measures against bank laundering of narcotics profits, and the restriction of access to sophisticated weapons by drug traffickers.

No fewer than 11 congressional committees have worked on writing this bill; of 149 amendments proposed, the bill reached the House with 36 of them approved. This exaggeratedly high number of amendments indicates the great interest in the subject during a presidential election year. Well-informed sources say that the bill will be approved at the latest in the month of October, such that the debate on drugs on Capitol Hill will necessarily influence the electoral process, including the presidential race.

The House version of the bill includes a controversial amendment providing for the death penalty for drug traffickers who commit murder, and the Senate bill is also expected to include this provision. While this issue is likely to attract the most emotion, it is not the decisive one when it comes to stopping the killer drug trade. The decisive issue has to do with what Congress has evaded: ruthless prosecution of drug-money launderers.

The proposed measures in the first draft of the law are pitifully inadequate to deal with this fundamental problem in the drug empire. The bill does not declare the practice of laundering drug dollars to be a crime. It merely toughens certain technical procedures, such as reducing the limit of cash transactions per person from \$10,000 to \$3,000, and obligating the banks to give reports on electronic transactions coming from abroad.

After years of grandstanding by candidates for public office on the "war on drugs," Congress owes to American citizens and our allies a level of commitment that matches up to the model of courage recently dem-

onstrated by some of our neighbors in Ibero-America, who live in the countries that produce much of the illegal dope smuggled into the United States, and who face the bestiality of the mafia's armies as a threat to their daily survival.

● In *Colombia*, on Aug. 24, Judge Consuela Sánchez demonstrated heroic courage by issuing indictments against cocaine king Pablo Escobar and three men on his payroll for the murder of *El Espectador* publisher Guillermo Cano. The target of death threats for months, Judge Sánchez had been warned by Escobar's friends on Aug. 2 that if she dared to indict him, "we are capable of executing you anywhere on this planet. . . . You will see all the members of your family fall one by one."

● In *Panama* on Aug. 8-12, the drug task force of the "Meeting Toward a Second Amphictyonic Congress" including delegates from every nation of Ibero-America, delivered a report that calls for a joint, "devastating attack that simultaneously destroys all the cultivation, laboratories, and distribution centers of drugs; while at the same time fighting the criminal drug traffickers themselves, achieving as a result the collapse of narcotics supply and producing intelligence information that would permit getting to the real target of the operation, namely, the big shots who finance the trade and launder the dirty money."

The Amphictyonic report continues: "These financiers and bankers should be judged and jailed on charges of treason to their nations." Their goods should be confiscated and the proceeds should go into a fund that will help to create a Latin American Common Market that will put the continent on its feet economically, build great infrastructural projects, and provide "the peasants victimized by drug cultivation with a cooperative agricultural program to provide each of our nations with long-awaited food self-sufficiency."

Given these displays of courage by our Ibero-American neighbors, if the Congress will put some teeth into measures against the drug profiteers in our banking system, the war on drugs can be won.