

Congressional Closeup by Barbara Dreyfuss and Susan Kokinda

Hearings scheduled on competitive health plans

The Health Subcommittee of the House Committee on Ways and Means will hold hearings beginning Sept. 30 on legislation which, its authors claim, will foster competition in the health-care industry. One major piece of legislation is the National Health Care Reform Act, H.R. 850, authored by Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) under which Medicare recipients would receive vouchers to buy private health insurance rather than receive government-run health insurance. The bill also says that private employers have to give their employees several alternative health care plans. Opponents of the voucher system warn that it would mean drastic cuts in health care for the elderly, because retired people would get very small sums of money in the form of vouchers and would be able to buy only limited coverage. It is admitted by supporters of the voucher system that it is a "cost-cutting" measure.

The hearings will include representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, the head of the Congressional Budget Office Alice Rivlin, and spokesmen for insurance companies and private employers. "Those who want competition have made known their views," declared an aide on the subcommittee. "We want to hear from those who will be affected." The subcommittee wants to use these hearings to help shape administration policy.

Because the administration is still of developing its own program on this, subcommittee sources don't expect legislation to be sent to the House floor until next year.

However, Capitol Hill sources report that Rep. Willis Gradison (R-Oh.), a cosponsor of the Gephardt legislation, will try to attach an amendment creating a voucher system for Medicare to whatever Social Security financing bill reaches the House floor this year.

Committee finds wide drug use by military

Forty-two percent of all U.S. armed forces in Europe use drugs while carrying out their military duties, and almost half the Navy uses drugs while on active duty. These are the startling conclusions of a report titled "Drugs in the Military" released Sept. 16 by the House Select Committee on Narcotics. The study is based on a survey of 1,906 U.S. military personnel in Italy and West Germany. The report found that active-duty drug use in the Air Force was 17 percent, 35 percent among marines and in the Army, it was 43 percent. The House committee's report thus proves that if the Reagan administration is serious about reviving a strong America, it must clean up the drug crisis.

The committee took a special survey of the use of cannabis and stimulants on the nuclear carrier *Forrestal*, perhaps prompted by reports that several of the recent carrier accidents were caused by personnel using drugs. The committee report concluded that 60 percent of the men on the ship were using those drugs while on active duty.

The committee report found that cannabis use among the Army was 38 percent and 24 percent among Marines, supposedly the

elite military branch.

The committee will hold hearings Sept. 17 with representatives of the military services and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health John Berry to discuss what action to take on this crisis.

Porter: tie foreign aid to population control

Congressman John Edward Porter (R-Ill.) a member of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee suggested in a floor statement Sept. 15, that U.S. foreign aid be tied to a recipient nation's establishment of strict birth-control measures. Porter is one of the first elected officials to actually call for the United States to try to coerce nations into limiting their populations.

In an interview with *EIR*, Porter stated that his suggestion came after a trip he took recently to India and China. "I was struck by the fact that in India there is a huge increase in population, and they don't seem to be able to get population-control measures in place that have a chance of working, and whatever they gain economically is lost to population increases.

"By contrast China, where we visited, has huge population increases—[but] they are totalitarian so it is easier for them to get a handle on it and they seem to have a strong program of encouraging population control. There seems to be more hope for the future in this totalitarian society than in the democratic society of India," declared the congressman, assuring *EIR* that he does not, however, favor totalitarian methods.

Ignoring the fact that industrial expansion and population growth have historically gone together, Porter declared, "I'm saying that there is no chance of economic advancement where the population outruns a reasonable idea of economic expansion. India has no future if the population growth rate is at the point it is right now."

Kennedy satisfied with NLRB nominee

Despite deep concerns from organized labor over his nomination to membership of the National Labor Relations Board, Robert Hunter breezed through his confirmation hearings before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, Hunter's role in producing the labor section of the Heritage Foundation's report "Mandate for Leadership," which called for radical and decimating changes in labor laws, was a major point of concern. The Heritage Foundation is a Socialist International penetration operation into the conservative movement in the U.S.

Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) anticipated Democratic questioning of Hunter on this point, and asked Hunter to clarify his relationship to the Heritage report. Hunter, who had been staff director of Hatch's committee prior to his nomination, explained that he was only "project manager" of the section and did not necessarily agree with all its recommendations. Then, Sen. Edward Kennedy, ranking Democrat on the committee, weakly picked up the questioning with "Why should working people expect a

fair shake from you?"

In cross-examining him on the Heritage Foundation report, Kennedy was not able to collect himself enough to ask Hunter which sections of the report he did agree with and which he disagreed with.

Hunter did concede in the course of the hearings that he supported a national right-to-work law, but that this, as a personal opinion, would not interfere with his ability to uphold the National Labor Relations Act as currently written. Kennedy announced himself "satisfied" with Hunter, and the Senate committee, as well as the entire Senate, confirmed Hunter without objection.

Farm coalition shows fractures

The failure of efforts by Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) to kill an amendment to the 1981 farm bill revoking the federal peanut program offered by Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) on Sept. 16 has "blown apart" the farm coalition in the Senate. As a result, the Senate may be unable to pass new farm legislation before Sept. 30 when the current law expires, and farm policy would revert to the Agriculture Act of 1948 which stipulates commodity price supports at 90 percent of parity.

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) has already threatened to pull the omnibus bill off the floor. The Lugar amendment's success opens the door to divisive and potentially unresolvable fights over the tobacco and sugar programs, with the peanut program part of elaborate

budget compromises the White House made with Southern legislators through Helms. Now Helms has had the rug pulled out from under him by a fellow Republican, and the budget compromises as well as the farm bill are jeopardized.

Lugar apparently acted in conformity with his rigid belief in the "free market," a view he shares with the American Farm Bureau Federation, which several weeks ago called for a one-year extension of existing farm legislation rather than a new law maintaining what they deem to be excessive "government intervention."

Reports indicate that angry dairy state senators jumped on the Lugar bandwagon after they had been defeated a day earlier in attempts to hold price-support levels at the low 70 percent of parity. Instead, the Senate gave complete discretion to the secretary of Agriculture to set support prices, in effect gutting the dairy program.

John Melcher (D-Mont.), also a member of the Agriculture Committee and sponsor of an alternate omnibus farm bill that would have set major commodity support levels at 75 percent of parity across the board, told the press that the Reagan administration's eleventh-hour demands for more budget cuts had "dynamited" the coalition, and "made it impossible to agree on any bill."

Before the Stockman demands for deeper 1982 budget cuts, it had been expected that the farm bill would be swiftly railroaded through the Senate, but that it might encounter difficulty in the House. So far, it has not been scheduled for floor action in the House.