

## Congressional Closeup by William Jones

### Congress approaches Gramm-Rudman limits

As the Congress rushes to get all the appropriations bills passed before adjournment, congressional aides indicate that Congress is within about \$200 million of over-shooting the \$146 billion deficit ceiling allowed under the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law.

If spending exceeds that ceiling, there will be automatic, across-the-board reductions. At that point, the only way for Congress to avoid agency-by-agency cuts, would be to come up with new revenues or to offset cut-backs elsewhere in the budget.

### AIDS bill: Congress refuses to face reality

After a rather heated debate, the House of Representatives passed the AIDS Federal Policy Act of 1988, by a 367-13 margin. The dissenting votes were by conservative Republicans, who didn't believe that the bill would stop the spread of the disease. Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.), who did more than anyone to try to mold this bill into a halfway workable proposition, in the end voted against it.

In committee, Dannemeyer had done his best to put some content into what can best be characterized as an AIDS civil rights or an AIDS education bill, initiated by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.). Primarily due to the efforts of Dannemeyer, the final version of the bill did, however, include provisions requiring testing of individuals convicted of prostitution, of a crime relating to sexual assault, or of a crime relating to an intravenous substance.

Other Dannemeyer amendments

calling for the testing of all prisoners and routine testing of hospital admittees, if the hospital is located in a state where the incidents of AIDS infection is more than 0.1%, were resoundingly voted down. More significantly, a Dannemeyer amendment which would allow public health authorities to locate any individual who has tested positive for HIV infection, was also defeated.

An amendment by Rep. Bill McCollum (R-Fla.), which would require physicians and counselors to notify the spouses of infected individuals, was also rejected. More broadly, the principle of reportability of those infected with the AIDS virus was totally rejected by this piece of legislation. The legislation does not allow giving an AIDS test, unless the tester has received the written permission of the person being tested. The bill also imposes a fine of up to \$10,000, under the pretext of respecting confidentiality, on anyone revealing that a person has AIDS, except under very narrowly defined circumstances.

It was clear to a few congressmen, however, that the reality of the AIDS issue would at some point force legislators out of the dream-world they are now living in. Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) commented, "I am absolutely convinced that we are going to not only have reportability, we are going to have testing and on a routine basis for everybody in this country, and we are going to have contact tracing down the road. It will happen because, as the epidemic spreads, the American people are going to demand it. . . . This thing is not going to go away, unless we find a vaccination or a cure, yet we act in this body as if it will. It will not. It will spread in an exponential manner until we come to grips with

it. The problem is the longer we wait, the more difficult it is going to be, and the more millions of people who are going to die."

The real question facing the nation is, at the point Congress begins facing the reality of the AIDS epidemic, will it then be too late?

As one congressional aide put it, "This bill throws the ball back to the individual states. If anything's going to be done about the AIDS crisis, *they* are going to have to do it."

The AIDS Federal Policy Act of 1988 in effect penalizes those trying to stop the spread of the killer disease.

### House okays trade sanctions against Iraq

On Sept. 27, the House approved by a 388-16 vote a bill to impose trade sanctions against Iraq for its alleged use of poison gas against its Kurdish minority.

The Senate had earlier approved a much stronger bill, and the differences in the bills must be ironed out in a House-Senate conference committee before being sent to the White House for approval. The House measure would initially ban shipment to Iraq of arms, other items that could have military use, and chemicals that could be used to produce chemical weapons. Under a second tier of sanctions, the President would be allowed to impose further penalties, including a ban on U.S. agricultural exports to Iraq and a prohibition on imports of oil from Iraq.

The Senate bill would halt U.S. credit and sales of most materials to Iraq, bar oil imports from Iraq, and require the United States to vote against