

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

loans to Iraq by international financial organizations. President Reagan is expected to veto any sanctions bill.

Congress re-works DoD authorization bill

The Department of Defense Authorization bill, which President Reagan had vetoed on Aug. 3 because of the cuts made by Congress in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and certain arms control provisions, has now been revised, with certain minor changes, and approved by the House and the Senate. The changes do little to alleviate the financial squeeze on the SDI.

The amount of money allotted to the SDI for Fiscal Year 1989 will remain at the \$4.1 billion level. This was the amount permitted by Congress in the vetoed bill—down from the \$4.9 billion requested by the President. The new bill, however, eliminates the restrictions of the first bill as to how the money was to be spent.

In the first variant, Congress tried to cripple the SDI research by shifting the emphasis of the SDI monies from space-based missile defenses to ground-based systems. These restrictions were taken away, although Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci, who was negotiating on behalf of the White House, had to give assurances that any cuts the Pentagon makes in money it devotes to development of the land-based systems would be no deeper than the overall cut in the anti-missile program.

The bill also puts limits on the planned space-based interceptor system. "The reason we put that ceiling on the space-based interceptor," said Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee, "was

the great skepticism up here about it, and I think Mr. Carlucci himself now recognizes there are problems."

Rangel launches drug legalization debate

On Sept. 29, hearings were held by the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse, chaired by Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), to "investigate" the possibility of drug legalization. The "honored guest" was Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore, the foremost proponent of drug legalization since his election last year.

The hearings were "loaded" in favor of drug legalization, with many representatives from the National Organization for the Repeal of the Marijuana Laws (NORML) present. An exception to this was Jerald Vaughn, executive director of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, who pointedly asked why hearings on drug legalization were being held at all, since the whole idea was so patently insane.

New York City Mayor Ed Koch testified against drug legalization, referring to the failed attempts in Great Britain to legalize heroin: The number of addicts quadrupled in five years! Koch emphasized that we have to do more, not less, in the War on Drugs. "It is time to raise the battle flag, not wave the white one," said Koch. And this is indeed what any form of drug legalization would be—a surrender to the drug lords.

Congressman Rangel says that he is opposed to legalization. The question should then be repeated: "What purpose do such hearings serve, if not that of introducing the 'legalization' issue as a legitimate response to the

drug problem?"

As one of the NORML people gleefully put it, "The genie is now out of the bottle."

Speaker Wright does it again

House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.) again became the center of controversy, in responding to the accusations that he had revealed confidential information from CIA intelligence briefings. Wright said that it was the right of congressmen to disclose or criticize secret intelligence matters, saying that even though "a matter is classified—secret—doesn't mean it is sacrosanct or immune from criticism."

Most House Democrats would not comment on the issue. Rep. Beverly Byron, a Maryland Democrat, said, however, that Wright's remarks have effectively disqualified him from acting as a broker between the Marxist Nicaraguan government and its civil and armed opponents. Needless to say, House Republicans were in a fighting mood. "The Speaker is dead wrong about what's been done and what he said," said Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee. "He has totally destroyed the reputation of Congress to be able to keep classified information secret."

In a straight party-line vote on Sept. 28, the House Intelligence Committee refused a request by Republican members to provide classified information to the ethics committee that would clarify whether Wright had violated House rules in discussing the issue. Republicans have threatened to press the issue, saying that it could turn the final days of the 100th Congress into a partisan confrontation.