

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Senate moves to protect right to demonstrate

On Sept. 19 the Senate passed an amendment to the Appropriations Bill for the Departments of Veterans' Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, denying funding to municipalities which fail "to adopt and enforce a policy prohibiting the use of excessive force by law enforcement agencies . . . against any individuals engaged in nonviolent civil rights demonstrations."

The amendment, proposed by Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.), is designed to prevent the abuses of various cities' police forces in breaking up pro-life demonstrations outside abortion clinics. "The Senate abhors the kind of beating and manhandling of peaceful demonstrators we've heard about in recent press accounts, and we will not tolerate it," he said. "Our desire is to send an unmistakable message . . . that we are not going to stand still and watch as nonviolent protesters are manhandled, brutalized, and mistreated in the way described in the news accounts."

The House version of the HUD Appropriations Bill contained a less stringent provision which does not require communities applying for HUD grants to certify that they have adopted and are following a policy banning the use of excessive force.

Burton: 25-30 million AIDS infected by 1999

Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) urged fellow legislators in remarks on the House floor on Oct. 19 to put pressure on health agencies and President Bush to implement a program which includes mandatory testing, contact tracing, and reportability for the AIDS virus. "If the United States does not come up with a strong policy soon,"

said Burton, "we are going to have 4 million people in this country dead or dying of this terrible disease and probably another 25 to 30 million infected" by 1999.

At the cost of \$5 per test, the entire American population from the ages of 12 to 65 could be tested annually for less than \$650 million, Burton explained. The financial cost of not doing enough now will be mind-boggling. "When we reach the 21st century," he said, "if a large portion of our teenage population is infected with AIDS, and they are dead or dying over the next couple of decades, it is going to put a tremendous burden on the economy, not to mention the health costs involved." He added, "For each person who has the AIDS virus it costs around \$100,000 to take care of them until they die.

"The nation still lacks the most basic knowledge to deal with the epidemic, researchers concluded. Until the data exist to make sound projections, public policy will continue to fly blindly into the growing storm. We are facing a real pandemic," he said.

Senate Judiciary to consider RICO reform

Sen. Gordon Humphrey (R-N.H.) said on Oct. 24 that the Senate Judiciary Committee would soon be taking action to reform the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO).

"While the RICO statute provides an important law enforcement tool for prosecuting organized crime racketeers, RICO's civil action provisions have increasingly been used for purposes having nothing to do with the law's original purpose," said the Senator. "Perhaps the most alarming abuse has been the threat it is presenting to freedom of speech. There has

recently been a rash of civil RICO actions being used to suppress demonstrations and public protests which have nothing at all to do with racketeering activity."

While providing no details, the senator said that the Senate Resolution reforming RICO "includes appropriate language to remove legitimate First Amendment activity from the threat of RICO suits."

Scherer tells Congress: Gorbachov out by summer

In meetings with half a dozen Representatives and Senators, former West German military intelligence chief, Brig. Gen. Paul Albert Scherer (ret.), outlined how the Soviet Union would be convulsed by strikes before Christmas, leading to the ouster of the Gorbachov group from positions of power by the summer of 1990.

General Scherer, until 1977 the head of the military intelligence section of the West German Bundeswehr (Army), impressed on them the need to fight tooth and nail to prevent any U.S. troop withdrawal from Western Europe until the summer of 1990. By that time, General Scherer assured them, the situation in the Soviet Union would have become so apparently chaotic and dangerous that there would be very little support for such a withdrawal.

Some congressmen assured him that he need not worry, as the pace of the legislative process would not allow for any quick decisions to be made within that time-frame.

'We should not panic' SEC chief tells Congress

In testimony before the House subcommittee on Telecommunications

and Finance on Oct. 26, Richard Breeden, chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission tried to blame the Oct. 13 mini-crash on Wall Street on the lack of information about takeover financings and trading strategies by Wall Street brokerage firms. "We should not panic in the face of these events," said Breeden, who claimed that they demonstrated the "strength and resiliency of the nation's markets."

Breeden argued that greater disclosure by the brokerage firms would allow the regulators to prevent stock market selloffs from turning into full-blown financial panics. The chairman of the Securities Industry Association Edward O'Brien, however, said that disclosures of the identities of traders and their strategies would "compromise legitimate market needs for confidentiality," driving business abroad to foreign stock exchanges and brokerage houses. Although attempting to assuage nervous legislators, Breeden admitted that stock market volatility was likely to continue.

Turkey uses sanctions against U.S. military

In reaction to the recent U.S. Senate resolution memorializing the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923, the Turkish government announced on Oct. 25, that it was imposing temporary sanctions against U.S. military activity in Turkey.

One administration official called the actions "a shot across our bow" meant to underline how sensitive an issue the resolution is to Turkey. The resolution passed the Judiciary Committee earlier in October by an 8-6 vote, but has not been taken up by the full Senate.

A Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman in Ankara said the U.S. government had been notified of the sanctions a week ago and that they are already in effect. Sources in Washington said the sanctions include a temporary halt to U.S. Navy port visits to Turkey, a halt to bombing missions by U.S. F-16 planes in a test range in the Konya Plateau, restrictions on the modernization of some U.S. military facilities, and suspension of meetings between the U.S. Embassy and the Turkish government on military cooperation.

Congress exempts some programs from cuts

In an overwhelming 401-18 vote on Oct. 24, Congress decided to exempt disaster relief aid for the San Francisco earthquake and Hurricane Hugo from the spending limit provisions of the Budget Act and the Gramm-Rudman Act, so as not to let it be affected by the Gramm-Rudman sequester which President Bush signed into effect on Oct. 16. This is the first concrete step that Congress has taken in the aftermath of the first Gramm-Rudman sequester to eliminate the damaging effects of that particular piece of legislation.

At the moment, however, the proponents of the "balanced budget" still hope that these exemptions remain the "exception to the rule" and that further crises would not further undercut the Gramm-Rudman austerity criteria.

House upholds Bush veto on abortion

Pro-abortion supporters were unable to gather the necessary support to overrule the presidential veto of legislation previously passed by the House

which would allow the use of federal money for abortions for poor women whose pregnancies result from rape or incest.

Since 1981, federal law has permitted Federal financing of abortion only when the pregnant woman's life is in danger. The vote in the House on Oct. 25 was 231-191 in favor of overturning the presidential veto, 51 short of the two-thirds required. The vote, coming in the wake of the decision of the Pennsylvania legislature to implement more stringent abortion laws, was considered a victory by the pro-life lobby. President Bush, who had earlier tried to find a compromise on the abortion issue, felt that further vacillation on a controversial issue would strengthen the growing image of the President as waffling on major matters of principle.

Brady balks at stock market regulation

Treasury Secretary James Brady balked at more stringent restrictions on the stock markets, during hearings before the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Investigation Committee on Oct. 26. The senators were concerned with the violent fluctuations on the markets since the Oct. 13 collapse, and are desperately seeking regulatory means to prevent a repeat of the October 1987 crash.

Brady agreed with the committee that the Securities and Exchange Commission needed more powers, although he warned the legislators about going too far to eliminate market volatility. "cannot and should not attempt to eliminate major market moves, whether by legislation or regulation,"aid Brady.

The problems the market was having, Brady tried to explain, are due to the electronic revolution.