

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Contagion has no civil rights: Armstrong bill

Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.) introduced a bill on March 6, S. 673, to make clear that contagious diseases do not have civil rights. Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) has introduced H.R. 1396, an identical bill into the House.

The bill would amend the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to clarify that any individual with a contagious disease is not to be considered handicapped as long as he is contagious. To Sec. 7(8) is added the following: "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the term 'individual with handicaps' does not include any individual who has a contagious disease, whether or not such individual is physically or mentally impaired during the period of such individual's contagion."

Armstrong said that it is essential to clarify the intent of Congress with respect to contagious diseases in the wake of the Supreme Court decision, *School Board of Nassau County vs. Airline* which "is sure to create widespread confusion, apprehension, and perhaps danger." "We cannot let our concern for the sick override our responsibility for public health," Armstrong warned. "The Supreme Court seems to have done that."

"The Court did not clearly signal employers that they may dismiss employees who have an actively contagious disease," Armstrong said. "It did not give schools the assurance that they may immediately act to safeguard health. It leaves us all wondering what rights healthy persons have to remain well. That uncertainty is sure to be disruptive. Its end result will be the erection of roadblocks in cases where swift action is urgently required."

The bill will be referred to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on the Handicapped chaired by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and ranking member Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), both of whom are expected to be extremely hostile to the proposal. While the Court specifically said it was not ruling on AIDS, committee staff argue that AIDS is "not easily contracted" in a school or work setting, and should be treated as a handicap.

Coyne pushes to get real unemployment picture

Rep. William Coyne (D-Pa.) introduced H.R. 1639 on March 17 in an attempt to get a clearer idea of the real unemployment rate in the nation. The bill would require the Bureau of Labor Statistics to expand its reporting of discouraged workers and those who are involuntarily working part time.

"The goal of my bill," Coyne said, "is to make available to Congress, the administration, and the business community the clearest picture possible of the country's overall jobless situation."

Coyne noted that "the administration would have us believe," and the BLS figures would indicate, that we have "turned the corner on unemployment." But "nothing could be further from the truth," Coyne said. "Those official figures are deceiving and mask a much deeper and more fundamental issue of unemployment—the issue of hidden unemployed. These people are men and women who want to work and need a job but have become so frustrated about their prospects for finding a new job under the current

economic conditions, that they have stopped looking for work altogether."

Coyne estimated that there are currently 1.2 million discouraged workers and "this figure has not budged in four years." When taken into account in his state, Coyne said that unemployment jumps from 6.7 to over 10.5%.

A spokesman for Coyne pointed to the example of Beaver County, Pa., which had the largest monthly unemployment drop in the country during January 1986 at a time when LTV steel was closing its plants, a disastrous situation locally. "What is reality, that's what we're trying to find," he said.

Coyne pointed out that he had tried to resolve this reporting problem when he and 38 Members wrote to the BLS last October. The BLS said that it could not comply with the reporting. Coyne noted that budget cuts were forcing the agency to omit reporting unemployment rates for 25 metropolitan statistical areas.

Corporate raiders come under lawmakers' scrutiny

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) has begun oversight hearings on insider trading and hostile takeovers of American corporations by Wall Street and international corporate raiders.

On March 4 Proxmire took testimony from spokesmen for 16 corporations including USX, Goodyear, Champion International, Borg-Warner, and others. The takeover battle has been described as a "war" between raiders and corporate management teams, with the viability of American industry at stake.

"The testimony was strong. It was eloquent," Proxmire said later. "It was an appeal to the Congress to act. These leaders of American business argued that we need congressional legislation. We need it now. Hostile takeover attempts are sharply reducing this nation's competitiveness. It is hurting our economic productivity. It is loading up our corporations with debt. That debt makes our corporations far more vulnerable to recessions."

No corporate leader wanted to stop mergers or takeovers if it corrected poor management and increased production and productivity. But most pointed to the collapse of production, closing of plants, layoffs, collapse of R&D investment, etc., as the result of these raiders' activity.

William Wall from Kansas Power and Light said that the raiders have left companies "managing their books rather than their companies." He said that "it's about time we called these raiders out and took a good look at them in the daylight," as well as "the link between investment banker, raider and arbitrageur, [and] the vast riches taken not as the reward for producing a product or creating new jobs, but through illegal use of information."

Congress oks highway bill; veto fight ahead

Congress passed a highway and mass transit bill by wide margins, voting 407 to 17 in the House on March 18 and 79 to 17 in the Senate on March 19, as supporters mobilized to override a certain presidential veto.

The \$87.5 billion, five year bill, is an important infrastructure program of which only roughly \$100 million comes out of general revenue funds.

The rest comes out of the highway trust fund which is the states' by statute. "The governors are understandably bitter that we have failed to follow through on our responsibility to return these moneys to them," Senator Lugar said Jan. 13.

Supporters had hoped to pass the bill last year, and have tried to get it passed as soon as possible this year to allow states to get the bidding process for highway repairs under way. If a Reagan veto is sustained, an entire highway building season will be lost costing 800,000 jobs.

Some of these jobs are lost already. Senator Lugar (R-Ind.) pointed out on Jan. 13 that he had heard from "scores of contractors who are considering laying people off or even shutting down completely for want of highway construction jobs." He added that "there may even be cases where the public's safe enjoyment of their highways will be at risk."

Republicans have been active in trying to get Reagan to stop his idiotic opposition. In a rare move, 11 of 12 House-Senate conferees including Senators Stafford (R-Vt.) and Symms (R-Idaho), and Representatives Shuster (R-Pa.) and Hammerschmidt (R-Ark.), sent a letter to Reagan saying that the bill "is too important to the economy, business productivity and personal mobility to let that [delay] happen."

The White House is mobilizing to support a veto in the Senate, arguing that this is essential for Reagan to re-emerge as an active and powerful President. It has changed Stafford's vote, but House Republican leader Robert Michel (Ill.) said he will not support the veto. Speaker of the House Jim Wright (D-Tex.) said that "that is an inadequate and even petulant rea-

son to veto legislation that the American people need."

Hollings rips Nunn for ABM rewrite attempt

Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) blasted Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and other senators for their position that the ABM Treaty does not allow for development of the Strategic Defense Initiative, charging that they "are rushing to judgment, shouting constitutional crisis, trying to unilaterally rewrite a treaty."

Testifying before the second joint hearing on the ABM Treaty of the Foreign Relations and Judiciary committees March 26, Hollings described arms control as an "art," and when you look for specific meaning of the language you go back to the negotiating record to "find why it was written that way and that hasn't been done by Senator Nunn, I can tell you that." Hollings said it was "absurd" for Nunn to suggest that "agreed statement D" allowing ABM systems based on new physical principles be negotiated for further clarification, since this is a major part of the treaty itself.

Hollings referred to the Jackson amendment to the SALT I treaty, adopted the same month, as evidence of Senate intent. "This was a commitment to test and develop our strategic weaponry. We had a superiority in technology and we were not about to give that away. That is how we maintain our freedom and the security of the free world today. No senator had in mind giving that up," Hollings said.

Hollings stressed that "the intent and meaning of the treaty itself" is the prime consideration, not why a senator voted for or against it.