

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Burton defends Masters and Johnson

In a speech on the floor of the House in mid-March, Rep. Dan Burton defended the recently published book by Masters and Johnson on the AIDS epidemic, which has been heavily criticized by official medical institutions. Burton (R-Ind.), who has authored legislation calling for mandatory testing of the entire population, stressed the need for quick action if we are to prevent a catastrophe.

"The facts show," said Burton, "that we have got a tiger by the tail. This is not an epidemic, but a pandemic staring us in the face. We have to head it off at the pass, and the only way to do it is to start off with testing." Burton referred to the studies by Dr. Alan Salzborg of Miles City, Montana, saying, "If we do not start by 1990 or 1991, his estimates are that by 1995 to 1998, in that three-year period, we will have somewhere between 3½ and 5 million people actually dead or dying from AIDS."

Referring to a statement by Surgeon General Koop, who played down the danger of catching AIDS in extramarital heterosexual relations, Burton commented, "Our Surgeon General is saying that the dimensions of this disease will not be known for years. What he is saying in effect is that it is going to continue to spread and there is no way of knowing how far it will spread and we are going to have to let it go unabated, except for maybe throwing out some educational materials to each household."

Burton also went on the offensive against those who are consciously down-playing the danger of the AIDS epidemic in order to prevent the spread of panic among the general population. "I believe just the opposite," said Burton. "Abraham Lincoln said, 'Let

the people know the facts, and the country will be saved.' If you want a real panic, those of you at HHS and CDC, just wait until this thing really gets out of control."

Burton continued with an analogy from the period of the Black Plague: "When the bubonic plague was at its height during the 14th and 15th centuries, if somebody was suspected of having the bubonic plague, they boarded up their house and they burned them alive, and if you think that cannot happen in a civilized country like the United States, you are wrong. We need to tell people what they are up against in this country. We need to get on with the testing program so we can minimize the damage."

Major gains predicted for the Democrats

Although Mike Dukakis is seen trailing George Bush in the presidential race in polls recently taken on Capitol Hill, the situation looks much worse for the GOP in congressional races this year.

The latest survey predicts that the Democrats will gain 10 seats in the House in November, increasing their margin to 267-168, and will have even odds or better of winning races for 15 seats now held by Republicans.

The GOP, on the other hand, has fair chances of winning races for only five seats now held by Democrats.

The rate of retirement plays a certain role here, with 12 Republican House members giving up their seats either to retire or to run for the Senate, as compared to only 7 Democrats. The picture becomes even gloomier for the Grand Old Party if one takes into consideration that the next congressional election will also be a referendum on

the "Reagan recovery"—which voters have heard so much about, but seen very little of.

Senate votes to restrict covert action

Despite veto threats from the White House and objections from Director of Central Intelligence William Webster, the Senate approved 71 to 19 a bill which would overhaul existing intelligence oversight legislation in order to close loopholes utilized by President Reagan to keep Congress in the dark for 10 months about the secret sale of arms to Iran and the diversion of profits to Contra forces in Nicaragua.

In place of current requirements for "timely notice" of such covert operations by the President, the bill would require notification in advance under "ordinary circumstances," and notice with delay of no more than 48 hours on "rare occasions when time is of the essence." Notification could be limited to the four top leaders of Congress, in cases where disclosure would put national security at "grave risk."

Attempts to lengthen the notification period were defeated by large margins. A proposal by Sen. John Chafee (R-R.I.) to extend the 48-hour notice limitation to 10 days was defeated 60-32. Another proposal by Sen. James McClure (R-Ida.), which would have allowed the President to withhold notification when lives were at stake or the cooperation of other countries jeopardized, was defeated 65-23.

President Reagan may deem it fit to veto the bill in its present form, although, as it was passed by such a wide margin, it is likely that Congress would override a veto.