

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda and Susan Kokinda

Congressional concern on AIDS grows

The House Republican Study Committee held hearings on the "Public Health Implications of AIDS" Nov. 7. The hearings reflected the growing fear of the AIDS epidemic, anger at the inaction of the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control in handling of the crisis, and popular pressure for congressional action to halt the spread of the disease.

Co-chaired by Reps. Bill Cobey (R-N.C.) and Tom Bliley (R-Va.), the hearings heard calls by nurses, dental health care professionals, and school officials for screening and quarantine, and "drastic revision" of health-care procedures in dealing with AIDS victims.

Reps. Joe Barton (R-Tex.), David Monson (R-Utah), William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.), and others, roasted CDC acting Director Dr. Donald Hopkins. "Why haven't you people in public health told the American people there is a crisis in the blood supply?" Dannemeyer demanded.

Hopkins claimed he would have "no hesitation" in taking a blood transfusion if he needed one today. Barton told Hopkins, "If we had adopted some fairly rigid quarantine measures four years ago we would not have one million people walking around with AIDS today. Why is quarantine not being seriously considered?" Hopkins claimed that current cases are the result of spread occurring before the educational campaign on how to protect oneself began. Monson then told Hopkins that the "fact is it's growing, it's not being curtailed. Warning people is not taking care of the problem."

Monson also questioned Hopkins on the "possibility that the traits of the

virus will change and be transmitted in other ways." Hopkins said this "will not happen, or if it does it will be very, very rare."

Under the pressure, Hopkins did promise that CDC will issue guidelines that health care professionals should wear protective garments, and will send a letter "today or tomorrow" to state and local health officials that bathhouses and similar establishments "can facilitate spread" of the disease and that they should consider steps to "regulate" them, or close them "only if it [stopping infection spread] can't be done by some other means." The senators were not placated.

One witness who came before the committee, Walter Johnson, District 16 N.Y. City school board member, called for screening for the AIDS virus for "all children and employees entering the public school system within the United States beginning the 1986-87 academic year," monitoring carriers, and removing those who come down with the illness from the schools to be given "proper home instruction." Johnson emphasized that AIDS was not a disease of drug users or homosexuals, but one "that has the general population 'at risk'. . . . The most 'at risk' group is the teenager." "I am today requesting federal intervention at all levels," he said.

Stephen Smith, President of Dental Services and Information Corp. of Michigan, testified on the dangers of AIDS spread through dental offices. He described some equipment as "in essence an open sewer," and called for Food and Drug Administration regulation of dental equipment, for proper inspections, and screening of dental health care personnel. Norma Watson, R.N. San Francisco General

Hospital, detailed for the committee how nurses there are ordered not to wear protective clothing when treating AIDS patients, and are now facing dismissal for their insistence that they protect themselves.

Candice Comstive, R.N. Houston, warned that health care professionals will leave their profession if not protected. She urged "regular mandatory screening" for all food handlers and health care professionals, that AIDS patients be isolated from the general hospital population, and that isolation procedures and needle precautions should be "drastically revised."

Rep. Cobey voiced his concern about the consequences of failure to address the AIDS epidemic "now, in a sane and rational manner."

McClure blasts State Department on ABM Treaty

Senator James McClure (R-Idaho) blasted the State Department on the floor of the Senate Nov. 1 for insisting on a "restrictive interpretation" of the ABM Treaty. "The State Department has already in effect traded away President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), even before the summit, and for no quid-pro-quo at all in Soviet arms reductions," McClure said. "The State Department's unfounded restrictive interpretation of the ABM Treaty binding us but not the U.S.S.R. simply constitutes U.S. unilateral disarmament."

McClure demanded that SDI be accelerated and geared toward near-term deployment. "I believe that it is imperative that the U.S. SDI program be restructured as soon as possible to

be consistent with the President's 'fully justifiable' interpretation of the ABM Treaty. . . . This would mean U.S. SDI technology demonstration tests as soon as possible," he said.

McClure said that it would be impossible to "deter illegal land-based Soviet ABM deployments" without "reorienting our own strategic defense initiative." "If America will not face up now to the necessity of responding proportionately to Soviet SALT breakout violations and their massive military buildup, will we be any more likely or able to respond five years into the future when the Soviets will be even stronger and we will be even weaker?"

McClure said the restrictive interpretation "is a way of putting off for 20 years a crucial decision needing to be made today" to redress Soviet offensive and defensive superiority.

Senators blast Soviet arms violations

Senators Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), Steve Symms (R-Idaho), and James McClure (R-Idaho) wrote President Reagan on Oct. 29, asking that he include "on the Geneva summit agenda" with Soviet leader Gorbachov, the 32 Soviet SALT violations which the administration has officially confirmed to the U.S. Congress.

In addition, the newest Soviet violation, the deployment of the SS-25 recently announced by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, "implies other developments which trigger at least four more violations," they said, and urged the President to confront the fact of these "five dangerous new Soviet SALT violations."

Putting the arms control process in

the context in which it might be credible, the Senators said to the President that in "our judgment, no new U.S.-Soviet arms control treaty can receive the advice and consent of two-thirds of the Senate for ratification until the Soviets reverse this pattern of 'break-out' from arms control. We believe that a summit confrontation on all Soviet violations of existing treaties is absolutely essential to preserve the credibility and prospects for improving international security through arms control."

According to press accounts, Helms, and several aids and associates including Dave Sullivan, Tom Ellis, and Jim Lucier, will travel to Geneva while the summit is taking place to try to ensure that nothing is given away on the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Senate committee hears counter-terrorism request

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) held hearings Nov. 5 on the Reagan administration's request for legislative authority and \$54 million in supplemental appropriations funding to initiate a Central American counter-terrorism program. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams told the committee that the request is necessary to "combat the rising threat of terrorism in Central America."

The bill, S.1757, would earmark \$27 million for "specialized military counter-terrorism assistance" to be run by the Pentagon, \$26 million for training of civilian police forces to be run by the State Department, and \$1 mil-

lion to provide protection to individuals who cooperate with the U.S. counter-terrorism program. Abrams said that "the most blatant terrorist attacks" have been in El Salvador, but there are also increasing threats in Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica. "There is the possibility" of terrorism in Panama, Abrams said, and the bill requests authority for a program for Belize but no specific program is contemplated at this time. "Passive measures . . . while essential, are not sufficient unto themselves," Abrams said.

An important political aspect raised by the other witness, U.S. Lt.-Gen. Phillip Gast, Director of the Defense Security Assistance Agency, went totally ignored by the committee. "There is a growing concern on the narco-terrorist threat" to Central America, Gast said. He described this as "an extension of the worldwide threat," where terrorists are trained by the Soviet Union, Cuba, Libya, and other countries. Gast also described the counter-terrorism program as one that would include special training, communications, vehicles for mobility, and maintenance help from ammunition to office supplies. Special units would be created for such operations as hostage rescue and "enhanced measures to detect terrorism and to go out and disrupt" terrorist operations before they strike.

Sen. Claiborne Pell (R.I.), the ranking Democrat on the committee, evidenced strong displeasure with the proposal. In terms reminiscent of the Carter administration, Pell said that most "human rights" violations were being conducted by right-wing organizations with the backing of these governments which the United States was trying to help.