

Congressional Closeup by Barbara Dreyfuss and Susan Kokinda

Government should fund hospices, say congressmen

Congressman Leon Panetta (D-Calif.) has introduced H.R. 5180, a bill to make people in hospices eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. At a time when hospitals are being closed all across the country, and medical care is becoming too costly for many people, a number of Congressmen have decided to support funding death centers rather than increased medical care and research.

In presenting his bill on Dec. 11, Panetta made no bones about the fact that his was a strictly "cost-cutting" move, at the expense of human lives. "By allowing hospices to be substituted for curative care, it is my judgment that we will be formulating a good public policy, and also establishing a good fiscal policy. . . . This legislation will not bring one single new person onto the Medicare roles. This is not a new add-on benefit. . . . An average day of hospice care has been found to cost one-fifth of the average day of care for the terminally ill in the typical American hospital."

It is of course no surprise that substituting drugging patients with a heroin-based Brompton mix for effective medicine and doctors, as many hospices do, will result in a far cheaper form of "care." Unfortunately, Panetta said, the extra "bereavement costs" associated with hospice treatment will raise the net cost of the hospices to 50 percent of hospital care.

An aide to one of the bill's co-sponsors, Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), justified the bill on the grounds that "a lot of people prefer to die

at home. At some point hospital benefits are not limited under Medicare. If you've been in for a while you may not have a choice."

The choice of going into a hospice instead of a hospital becomes irreversible. "If an individual makes such an election for a period to a particular hospice program, the individual shall be deemed to have waived all rights" to any further hospital care.

Co-sponsors of the bill include Reps. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), Claude Pepper (D-Fla.), William Gradison (R-Ohio), Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), Edward Madigan (R-Ill.), and Barber Conable (R-N.Y.) and Sens. Robert Dole (R-Kans.), Bob Packwood (R-Ore.), Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), John Heinz (R-Pa.), Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), Bill Bradley (D-N.J.), David Pryor (D-Ark.), Max Baucus (D-Mont.), and David Durenberger (R-Minn.).

Moratorium on banking dereg

Pressure from a wide spectrum of Congressmen and Senators prodded the Depository Institutions Deregulation Committee (DIDC), composed of the Secretary of the Treasury and other federal banking agency administrators, to postpone action on further savings institution deregulation, scheduled for consideration at Dec. 16 hearings. The DIDC, established under the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act of 1980, was to gradually phase out regulations on the thrift institutions, making them more com-

petitive with commercial banks. In reality, DIDC decisions have precipitously increased costs to the savings and loans at a time when high interest rates are strangling them. At the Dec. 16 meeting, the DIDC was to consider four more proposals which would further increase costs: 1) establishing a \$25,000 "wild-card" account with one day notice of withdrawal; 2) creating a \$5,000 minimum ceiling-free transaction; 3) setting up a 91-day \$10,000 minimum Treasury bill discount rate tied to the 13-week T-bill rate; and 4) establishing a new three-and-a-half year wild-card account.

Administration sources reported that pressure to postpone consideration of these further sweeping changes in the savings and loan sector came from, among others, Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), House Minority Leader Bob Michel (D-Ill.) and Senate Banking Committee Chairman Jake Garn (R-Utah). Senate Republicans have not distinguished themselves as foes of deregulation, but even they recognize that, by moving too fast, the DIDC threatens the existence of the nation's thrift institutions.

In the days preceding the DIDC meeting, a number of House Democrats also took the floor to publicly demand that the DIDC postpone action, including Rep. Don Bonker (D-Wash.), Don Bailey (D-Pa.), and Tom Luken (D-Ohio). In addition, on Dec. 9 Rep. Jerry Patterson (D-Calif.) introduced H.R. 5135, a bill to impose a six month moratorium on DIDC action. In a Dec. 15 floor statement praising Treasury Secretary Regan's decision to ask the

DIDC to postpone its Dec. 16 actions, Patterson stated: "H.R. 5135 is specifically aimed at preventing the Depository Institutions Deregulation Committee from causing further financial aggravation for the thrift industry." Patterson and his 43 co-sponsors want to give Congress a chance to "examine the deregulation of the financial industry thus far, to insure that the deregulation is proceeding as called for in the Depository Institutions Deregulation Act and Monetary Control Act of 1980." Senator John Danforth (R-Mo.) is reportedly considering similar legislation in the Senate.

Congress okays foreign aid bill

For the first time in three years, legislators succeeded, in the waning hours of the 97th Congress, in passing a Foreign Aid Appropriations bill. Failure by previous Congresses to pass such a bill has resulted in foreign aid being appropriated through continuing resolutions, as a simple extension of previous years' aid. The Senate agreed to a conference report on the bill on Dec. 15, and the House followed suit the next day.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the bill was a provision repealing the so-called Percy amendment, which prevents U.S. aid to countries for use in paraquat spraying of marijuana. The Percy amendment has made a mockery of the U.S. international campaign against narcotics, since paraquat can virtually eliminate a nation's marijuana crop, as in Mexico.

Leading anti-drug fighters in

Congress had succeeded in passing repeal of the Percy amendment for the past two years in the House, but have been roadblocked by the fact that there was no foreign aid bill passed.

Also included in the bill is another significant amendment, possibly presaging a larger fight next year against State Department support for population-control programs. The amendment prohibits any AID funds from being used to finance any research on abortions or involuntary sterilization. The effort on this was led by a former head of the New Jersey Right to Life Movement, freshman Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.).

Davis Bacon foes plan new drive in '82

Congressional foes of the Davis-Bacon Act plan a new drive in 1982 to gut the key provisions of the 50-year-old statute that guarantees the payment of prevailing union scale wages on federally funded construction projects.

According to aides to Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.), one of the ring-leaders working to overturn Davis-Bacon in the Senate, plans are underway to introduce amendments weakening the prevailing wage criteria and eliminating hundreds of millions of dollars from coverage at the earliest possible opportunity.

The aides report that Nickles and his backers in the anti-union contractors group, Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), and the Fabian Society's right-wing Trojan Horse, the Heritage Foundation, have all but given up hope of forcing repeal legislation

through Congress. Only last month, these forces were defeated in their efforts to eliminate military construction from Davis-Bacon coverage. Nickles's aides blamed individuals in Congress and the Department of Labor for convincing the White House to block efforts to weaken Davis-Bacon.

Nickles's people say that they must "bide their time and wait for a chance to pounce"; they think that time may come in an expected lame duck legislative session after next November's elections.

The Reagan administration has been unwilling thus far to absorb the political risk of a fight over Davis-Bacon. Pressure was exerted on the White House, according to Nickles's aides, by pro-Davis-Bacon Congressmen who threatened a filibuster that would have tied up budget legislation desired by the White House if it supported the military exemption rider submitted by Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.). The aide reported that Nickles—who claims he is loyal to President Reagan—was prepared to submit an amendment package far broader than the military exemption, for which aides claimed the support of 65 Senators, above the number needed to pass it. Nickles, however was taken aside by Thurmond and Sen. John Tower (R-Tex.), the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and told in no uncertain terms "to keep your amendments off the floor. That is what the White House wants. Period." Nickles therefore sat back and let Scoop Jackson of (D-Wash.) submit an amendment that reinstated Davis-Bacon coverage to the military construction legislation.