

AIDS 'hottest issue' in the states

by Kathleen Klenetsky

AIDS has so frightened the American population, that measures to deal with the epidemic are now dominating the agendas of many state legislatures. AIDS ranks number-four on the list of legislators' priorities, and is expected to jump to the top of the list by next year. According to Carol Thomas, of George Washington University's Intergovernmental Health Policy Project, AIDS is the "hottest political issue at the state level."

A recent survey conducted by the GWU project revealed that over 350 separate pieces of AIDS-related legislation had been introduced in state legislatures across the country during the first three-and-a-half months of this year. Only a few have been enacted, but, says one analyst who has been monitoring the situation, "I wouldn't be surprised if more than half the states passed some kind of AIDS measure by the end of the year."

The state-level legislation ranges widely. Some proposals would merely allocate more funds for AIDS education, or for distributing free condoms. But many would mandate tougher measures, including mandatory testing of certain groups (e.g., marriage-license applicants, food handlers, et al.), contact-tracing, and limited quarantine of AIDS carriers.

Like Proposition 64, the California ballot initiative which was defeated last November by the state's powerful homosexual lobby, backed by the American Medical Foundation for AIDS Research, a group funded heavily by Soviet agent Armand Hammer, many of the state bills seek to classify AIDS as a communicable disease, subject to the same kinds of public health measures as tuberculosis or syphilis.

As one source put it, there is "a very definite trend toward legislation that codifies existing public health measures, mandates that these measures be applied to AIDS carriers, [and] gives public health officials enhanced enforcement power."

The prevalence of these bills confirms that most Americans haven't bought the lies promulgated by the Centers for Disease Control and the Surgeon General's office that AIDS cannot be transmitted casually, and that mandatory testing will drive AIDS carriers underground. A recent poll conducted by the American Medical Foundation found that only 27% of the population trusts what the medical and scientific experts say about AIDS.

The most promising legislation under consideration is in

the Illinois and Colorado legislatures. Bills there would empower public health officials to require some mandatory testing, contact-tracing, and isolation of some AIDS carriers.

The Illinois House and Senate have passed several AIDS bills, although none has yet been made law. In mid-May, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, the House voted up several measures that would require local health departments to report to school officials the identity of children who are infected with AIDS; require people convicted of sex offenses, including prostitution, to be tested; require health workers to tell their employers if they have AIDS; and make it a felony for an AIDS carrier to deliberately donate blood.

At the same time, the Senate adopted the Illinois Sexually-Transmitted Disease Act, by a vote of 40-15. Its chief sponsor, Sen. Aldo De Angelis (R-Chicago Heights), describes the bill as a "comprehensive act," which "defines the steps the Public Health Service has to take" to deal with the disease. In an interview with *EIR*, De Angelis said his bill would permit quarantine under three circumstances: if a person volunteers for quarantine; if a high-risk establishment shows an unusual cluster of AIDS infections; and if an individual is "willfully and knowingly" transmitting the disease and "endangering the public health." In the last case, the individual could also be charged with a Class IV felony.

The legislation would also require contact-tracing, and would mandate the Department of Public Health to test individuals who may be carrying the disease to take an AIDS test. If they refuse, the DPH can obtain a warrant.

While public health officials already have many of these powers, they have never been codified in law, and thus the authorities are afraid to use them, said De Angelis. His bill will provide that legal back-up. "If you're going to deal with a public health problem of this magnitude," he said, "you need enforcement."

De Angelis told *EIR* that, three weeks ago, he would have said that his bill had an extremely slim chance of passage. "Now, it will almost certainly become law." De Angelis attributed this shift to recent revelations that the state health department has done little to stem the spread of the disease, and to a new study showing that Illinois has the fastest-growing body of AIDS carriers in the Midwest. The study projects that 500,000 state residents will be infected with the virus by the 1990s, and that 19,000 of them will die from it annually.

In California, meanwhile, state voters will get an opportunity to vote for an AIDS referendum almost identical to Proposition 64. On May 26, former officials of the Prevent AIDS Now Initiative Committee (PANIC), the key force behind Prop 64, submitted to the state Attorney General a draft ballot initiative to appear on the same 1988 ballot as the presidential primary in the state of California.

It will be a lot harder for the homosexual activists, Hollywood celebrities, and Armand Hammer to defeat the measure this time around.