

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Senate approves AIDS testing for immigrants

By an overwhelming 96-0 vote, the Senate acted on June 2 to add the AIDS virus to the list of dangerous contagious diseases for which immigrants to the United States are tested.

The vote was on an amendment to the FY87 Supplemental Appropriations bill, sponsored by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.).

A similar amendment offered by Helms, which also mandated AIDS testing by states for marriage licenses, had been defeated 63-32.

The measure directs the President to act by Aug. 31 to begin testing, including those illegal immigrants applying for legal status under the immigration reform program. Testing positive for the AIDS virus will now be grounds for exclusion from the country.

"The people of the United States will hold this Congress responsible if we don't do something about it," Helms said.

Sen. John Danforth (R-Mo.) said that the testing provision was "beyond dispute." He had voted against the earlier Helms amendment.

Cost had emerged as the major stumbling block to a broader testing program, in the May 21 debate. Sen. Pete Wilson (R-Calif.), who voted against Helms, objected to testing of marriage license applicants for AIDS unless the applicant bore the cost.

Senator Danforth asked whether spending to meet the AIDS threat would be open-ended. "How can we say that we are not concerned about the cost?" he asked. "Is there an unlimited claim on the health care dollar? Is it absolutely unlimited? Is the position of the Congress of the U.S.

that there is no cap? Send the bill."

Senator Brock Adams (D-Wash.), who also voted against the first Helms amendment, said he had "no philosophical objection to testing these groups, but I do have a practical problem." "Given limited resources," Adams said he wanted to test higher-risk groups first.

Technology could solve nuclear waste problem

Senator Chic Hecht (R-Nev.) introduced S. 1211 on May 15, the "Nuclear Waste Reprocessing Study Act of 1987," in an attempt to reassert a technological alternative to burying the nation's nuclear wastes.

"My bill would give the National Academy of Sciences until October 1989 to report to the Congress on the economic and environmental feasibility of a reprocessing program in the U.S.," Hecht said. "In the past, it has been argued that reprocessing was too expensive. But this was before we started to add up the bills for deep geologic disposal of nuclear waste. This approach is likely to cost our citizens more than \$30 billion. . . . In comparison, I am willing to bet that the price tag on reprocessing will turn out to be very reasonable."

Besides saving money, Hecht said it would "allow the country to reconsider an opportunity to make fuller and more efficient use of our limited energy resources." "I have recently returned from a trip to Europe," Hecht said, "where I saw first-hand a successful French program able to remove so much of the dangerous plutonium from the spent fuel, that only one ten-millionth of the original ma-

terial remains."

Hecht pointed out that such a technological solution would end the divisive national conflict over where to bury high-level waste. Energy and Natural Resources chairman Sen. Bennett Johnston (D-La.) recently offered to pay \$150 million per year to a state which accepted such waste.

Although Democrats are sensitive on the reprocessing issue because the Carter administration ended this technology, Hecht hopes to get hearings in Johnston's committee.

Kennedy introduces AIDS education bill

Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), chairman of the Labor and Human Resources Committee, introduced S. 1220 on May 15, the "AIDS Education, Information, Risk Reduction, Prevention, Treatment, Care, and Research Act."

Kennedy promised on May 15 that he and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), who has jurisdiction as chairman of the Health subcommittee in the House, would shortly introduce a second bill on AIDS testing, expected to emphasize voluntary testing and strict confidentiality.

This second bill, however, has not been introduced, and those who stress civil rights for AIDS victims and reject public health measures, are coming under pressure to consider testing measures. Not only has the Senate approved testing for immigrants, but an amendment mandating AIDS tests for immigrants and those seeking marriage licenses, sponsored by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), was supported by nine Democratic senators, including