

Congressional Closeup by Kathleen Klenetsky

Dannemeyer AIDS amendment approved

The House approved an amendment Oct. 15 which would require a proposed federal government entity to notify health-care workers about the dangers of AIDS. Sponsored by Rep. William Dannemeyer, a California Republican who has been among the most outspoken advocates of stronger measures to contain the deadly epidemic, the amendment was added to a bill that would establish a federal Risk Assessment Board, empowered to identify, notify, and prevent illness and death among workers who are at increased or high risk of occupational disease.

Dannemeyer's motion would put in this category health-care and emergency workers who are at risk of occupational exposure to AIDS. It also mandates the Risk Assessment Board to "determine the appropriate type of medical monitoring or health counseling with respect to such a population."

Dannemeyer pointed to numerous instances where health care workers have been infected with the AIDS virus, due to inadequate protection. He cited one horrifying case of a nurse at San Francisco General Hospital, who was told by hospital authorities that, in caring for AIDS patients, she could not wear gowns, masks, and gloves because this offended them. She has subsequently sued the hospital and the California Health Department for defects in her newborn son, believed to have been caused by her exposure to the AIDS virus during her pregnancy.

"I find that frankly to be wrong public-health policy," declared Dannemeyer. "Considering that we have between one and four million people who are infected with the virus, nobody knows how many, and we have

not yet adopted a national testing program to determine the extent of the virus in our society, if we do not want to have the phenomenon develop in America where the health-care workers are voting with their feet by going off their jobs, rather than exposing themselves to unnecessary risks, this is the kind of amendment we should be adopting so that our public health officials and the Department of Labor are giving notification to our health-care workers as to how they can protect themselves from getting this virus."

Major opposition to the amendment came from the stalwarts of the "AIDS lobby," including Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Rep. Joseph Gaydos (D-Pa.).

Senate passes War Powers substitute

After months of wrangling over whether to force President Reagan to apply the War Powers Act to the Persian Gulf reflagging deployment, the Senate approved a resolution Oct. 21 which puts off congressional action on the issue until next January.

The measure, co-sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) and Sen. John Warner, a Virginia Republican, requires the President to report to Congress on the situation in the Gulf within 30 days after it becomes law. Thirty days after that, the Senate would then vote whether to oppose or support the Gulf deployment. The 60-day period would not begin until the House passed the amendment, and the President signed it into law.

It endorses a U.S. military presence in the Gulf, but expresses "reservations" about the reflagging of Ku-

waiti oil tankers.

Warner called on President Reagan to approve the measure, on the grounds that it gives him a way to consult with Congress without invoking the War Powers Act. "It says, 'We support you, Mr. President, and your overall policy in the Gulf,' " Warner claimed.

Warner's characterization of the measure is far from accurate. Although it is admittedly much less of an intrusion into the President's policy-making powers—and less of a threat to the Persian Gulf deployment—than either the War Powers Act, or the Nunn-Byrd amendment offered late in the summer, it presents the threat that the Congress will indeed terminate the operation, which Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger has termed essential to protect international shipping, and to hold back Soviet incursions into the Mideast.

As Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), one of the major proponents of invoking the War Powers Act, put it, the resolution means that "the President can no longer keep Congress out of the way, and Congress has come to the realization that it does have a responsibility in matters of war and peace."

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a report in mid-October, suggesting how strong sentiment is on Capitol Hill for shutting down the U.S. escort operation. The study called for a new look at policy in the Gulf, faulting current policy for having "nebulous" goals and for inviting "more Iranian attacks of increasing severity."

It charges that the decision to reflag and protect Kuwaiti tankers was made hastily on poor rationale, and that the U.S. presence has made shipping in the Gulf less safe than before.