

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Contagion has no civil rights: Armstrong bill

Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.) introduced a bill on March 6, S. 673, to make clear that contagious diseases do not have civil rights. Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) has introduced H.R. 1396, an identical bill into the House.

The bill would amend the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to clarify that any individual with a contagious disease is not to be considered handicapped as long as he is contagious. To Sec. 7(8) is added the following: "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the term 'individual with handicaps' does not include any individual who has a contagious disease, whether or not such individual is physically or mentally impaired during the period of such individual's contagion."

Armstrong said that it is essential to clarify the intent of Congress with respect to contagious diseases in the wake of the Supreme Court decision, *School Board of Nassau County vs. Airline* which "is sure to create widespread confusion, apprehension, and perhaps danger." "We cannot let our concern for the sick override our responsibility for public health," Armstrong warned. "The Supreme Court seems to have done that."

"The Court did not clearly signal employers that they may dismiss employees who have an actively contagious disease," Armstrong said. "It did not give schools the assurance that they may immediately act to safeguard health. It leaves us all wondering what rights healthy persons have to remain well. That uncertainty is sure to be disruptive. Its end result will be the erection of roadblocks in cases where swift action is urgently required."

The bill will be referred to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on the Handicapped chaired by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and ranking member Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), both of whom are expected to be extremely hostile to the proposal. While the Court specifically said it was not ruling on AIDS, committee staff argue that AIDS is "not easily contracted" in a school or work setting, and should be treated as a handicap.

Coyne pushes to get real unemployment picture

Rep. William Coyne (D-Pa.) introduced H.R. 1639 on March 17 in an attempt to get a clearer idea of the real unemployment rate in the nation. The bill would require the Bureau of Labor Statistics to expand its reporting of discouraged workers and those who are involuntarily working part time.

"The goal of my bill," Coyne said, "is to make available to Congress, the administration, and the business community the clearest picture possible of the country's overall jobless situation."

Coyne noted that "the administration would have us believe," and the BLS figures would indicate, that we have "turned the corner on unemployment." But "nothing could be further from the truth," Coyne said. "Those official figures are deceiving and mask a much deeper and more fundamental issue of unemployment—the issue of hidden unemployed. These people are men and women who want to work and need a job but have become so frustrated about their prospects for finding a new job under the current

economic conditions, that they have stopped looking for work altogether."

Coyne estimated that there are currently 1.2 million discouraged workers and "this figure has not budged in four years." When taken into account in his state, Coyne said that unemployment jumps from 6.7 to over 10.5%.

A spokesman for Coyne pointed to the example of Beaver County, Pa., which had the largest monthly unemployment drop in the country during January 1986 at a time when LTV steel was closing its plants, a disastrous situation locally. "What is reality, that's what we're trying to find," he said.

Coyne pointed out that he had tried to resolve this reporting problem when he and 38 Members wrote to the BLS last October. The BLS said that it could not comply with the reporting. Coyne noted that budget cuts were forcing the agency to omit reporting unemployment rates for 25 metropolitan statistical areas.

Corporate raiders come under lawmakers' scrutiny

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) has begun oversight hearings on insider trading and hostile takeovers of American corporations by Wall Street and international corporate raiders.

On March 4 Proxmire took testimony from spokesmen for 16 corporations including USX, Goodyear, Champion International, Borg-Warner, and others. The takeover battle has been described as a "war" between raiders and corporate management teams, with the viability of American industry at stake.