

Congressional Closeup by Ronald Kokinda

Defense bill stalls over Levin-Nunn amendment

Senate Republican backers of the Strategic Defense Initiative prevented consideration of the Defense Authorization bill with a filibuster on May 13. It was the beginning of what is expected to be a months-long struggle over the interpretation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the extent of the SDI program.

SDI backers are attempting to remove an amendment sponsored by Senators Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) which would restrict work on the SDI to the so-called narrow interpretation of the ABM Treaty. The Nunn-Levin amendment would only allow more advanced testing or development of SDI systems if approved by both House and Senate.

The Defense bill is being held hostage by Nunn who has promised that the restriction will be included in any defense spending bill. If separated out as a bill by itself, Nunn and other opponents of a more aggressive SDI program fear that the Senate would sustain a presidential veto. Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) and 33 other senators have written to Reagan promising to sustain a veto.

Ranking Armed Services Committee member John Warner (R-Va.), condemned the Nunn-Levin provision as "a unilateral constraint on the United States on a military program which both the United States and the Soviet Union are now pursuing." It "would impose on the United States a restrictive interpretation of the ABM Treaty to which only the United States and not the Soviet Union would be bound."

Warner and other Republicans pointed out the blatant unconstitutionality of the amendment. It "would permit an unacceptable intrusion by Con-

gress into the President's jurisdiction to conduct our nation's foreign affairs," including ongoing arms-control negotiations in Geneva, and the President's treaty-making powers. Senators also objected that the provision for a veto by either house clearly violated the Senate's constitutional responsibility to advise and consent on treaties.

AIDS legislation blocked in committee

Reps. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) and William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) took to the House floor on May 11 to continue to educate their colleagues on the threat of the deadly AIDS virus, and strongly condemned the leadership of several House committees for refusing to schedule hearings on legislation they have introduced.

"We cannot even get a hearing on these bills because the committee chairmen do not agree with our position," Burton said. "All I can say is if we are correct, then it is criminal what these people are doing. And if we are not correct, at the very least it ought to be investigated."

Burton devoted a considerable degree of time to the need to determine whether transmission of AIDS was occurring in ways other than the assumed routes of sexual and blood contact. Burton outlined the work of Dr. Mark Whiteside where 50% of the cases of AIDS in Belle Glade, Fla., had no known cause. "I called Dr. Whiteside," Burton said, "and he said that he believed indeed that mosquitoes were a contributing factor to the spread of the virus in Belle Glade."

Dannemeyer noted that his bills

had been referred to several committees including Energy and Commerce, Judiciary, Armed Services, and Post Office and Civil Service. "None of them have been set for hearing by any of the committees," Dannemeyer said. "We are being stonewalled. They do not want to hold any hearings on these bills at all."

House rejects U.S. troop pullouts

The House acted on two amendments to the Defense Authorization bill on May 8, rejecting proposals to pull U.S. troops out of any NATO country or South Korea, thus dealing a blow to advocates of U.S. decoupling from our allies.

An amendment by Rep. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.) denying the use of funds for any purpose which would result in the reduction of U.S. troop levels in any NATO country below FY87 levels, was approved by voice vote.

"As far as the allies' not needing the U.S. like they used to," Rep. Beverly Byron (D-Md.) argued, "Let me remind my colleagues that our military is not forward deployed for reasons of charity. Rather, we are forward deployed because it is in our own best interest to be near the likely site of future conflicts. If we pull back, not only will we be sending a terrible political signal, we will also be hurting our military capability to respond in a crisis."

Byron warned: "If we terminate or reduce that support—especially at a time when we may withdraw intermediate nuclear forces from Europe—we are, indeed, inviting disas-