

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Anti-euthanasia bill called 'hollow'

On April 10, the House, by a vote of 398-16, passed a bill that will outlaw the use of Federal funds to pay for physician-assisted suicides, in the event that the Supreme Court overturns state laws banning assisted suicide. Despite the overwhelming vote, the debate was used as an ideological bully-pulpit, sidestepping the moral fact that euthanasia is a Nuremberg crime.

Neo-conservative arguments were typified by House Commerce Committee Chairman Tom Bliley (R-Va.), who reduced the moral question to the neo-cons' favorite issue, budget-balancing, saying, "The money we currently devote to such programs as Medicare and Medicaid, programs devoted to improving the health and extending the lives of the elderly, disabled, and low-income Americans, could be used instead for health care services intended to cause death."

Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) contended that the bill was unnecessary. "Tax dollars are not used for this purpose today, and there is no intention to change that long-standing policy," he said. He called the bill a "hollow exercise, probably designed to fill a massive hole in the do-nothing 105th Congress."

For the most part, the debate avoided the real issue underlying assisted suicide, although some members from both sides of the aisle, notably Ralph Hall (D-Tex.) and Charles Canady (R-Fla.), brought up the case of the Netherlands, where doctors regularly "suicide" their patients, which Canady said "vividly shows how the permitting of assisted suicide for the terminally ill can easily lead to the nightmare of nonconsensual termination of human life."

Dems frustrated with 'do-nothing' Congress

The first week after the Easter recess was punctuated with various attempts by the Democrats in both the House and the Senate to try to force action from the Republican leadership on a variety of legislative initiatives and, most especially, the fiscal year 1998 budget. At various times, Democrats challenged the Republican leadership to act on the Chemical Weapons Convention (see separate item) and children's health insurance proposals, and chastised especially House Republicans for bringing only insignificant legislation to the floor.

On April 8, the House Democrats, represented by Caucus Chairman Vic Fazio (D-Calif.), Barbara Kennelly (D-Conn.), and others, challenged the Republicans to pass the Democratic children's health insurance proposal by Father's Day. Fazio said that while Republicans pursue their agenda of "tort reform and talk among themselves," there's no discussion about the fact that there are 10 million children in the United States who have no health insurance.

Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) added, "People are frustrated that this Congress is not doing anything." He declared that the Federal government "has to act and it has to act now on this problem."

As for the legislative possibilities of their bill, Kennelly said, "We're in the same position as Kennedy-Kassebaum [the health insurance reform bill passed by the 104th Congress after much stalling by Republicans] was at the beginning. The Republicans need to be convinced."

That frustration reached fever pitch on April 9, when a debate on campaign finance reform exploded

into a shoving match. The Democrats had used a parliamentary maneuver the day before to force a chance for such a debate, as well as to hammer the House Republican leadership on the lack of action, so far, in the 105th Congress. Minority Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.) pointed out that the House has, so far, only taken up legislation of no consequence. "We have done nothing to improve the lives of American working families on health care, on education, on jobs," and on campaign finance reform, he said.

The trouble began when George Miller (D-Calif.) repeated accusations that have appeared in the press against, in particular, House Government Reform and Oversight Committee Chairman Dan Burton (R-Ind.) and Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.). "The American public is treated on a daily basis to account after account after account where money buys you privilege in the House of Representatives among the leadership and it buys you access," he said.

DeLay objected strenuously, and asked to have Miller's words stricken from the record. DeLay also objected to Miller's request to insert into the *Congressional Record* a 1995 *Washington Post* article alleging that lobbyists wrote legislation in DeLay's office. When DeLay claimed that the article didn't name any names of lobbyists, David Obey (D-Wisc.) rushed from his office to the House floor to confront DeLay with a copy of the *Washington Post* article. The confrontation resulted in a shoving match, and the two men had to be physically separated. When DeLay demanded some courtesy, Obey replied, "I prefer truth over courtesy any time."

Chemical Weapons treaty to get airing in Senate

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) said at a press conference on April 12 that, after much delay, the Chemical Weapons Convention may finally come to the Senate floor for debate and a vote before the end of April. The treaty has been held up for the last two years by Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who has blocked it by tying its consideration to some of his pet projects, such as State Department reorganization and United Nations reform.

The treaty, scheduled to take effect on April 29, establishes a control regime for chemical weapons production similar to that set up by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Senate Democrats, as well as the Clinton administration, raised the specter of the treaty's going into effect without U.S. participation, in order to try to get some motion out of the Republican leadership. They warned that if the treaty were to take effect without U.S. participation, U.S. chemical companies could be subject to sanctions. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright even requested to appear before Helms's committee on 24-hour notice, because the witnesses that Helms had scheduled to appear in hearings on April 8 and 9 were almost all former Reagan and Bush administration officials who were opposed to the treaty.

Lott indicated that the treaty could be taken care of in 15 hours of debate with only a limited number of amendments, and he expected that the language of the amendments would be resolved within a week. What remains to be seen is whether Democrats can muster 22 Republican votes in favor of the treaty, in order to have the nec-

essary two-thirds vote required for ratification.

Iran, China targetted in Senate hearings

On April 10, the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services held a hearing on arms proliferation that targetted two countries which are key in building the Eurasian Land-Bridge—China and Iran.

Subcommittee Chairman Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) said in his opening remarks that "China appears to be at the center of a worldwide proliferation web. It is clear that China has sold weapons technology to rogue nations, despite laws passed by Congress and despite discussions State Department officials have had with the Chinese government aimed at persuading Beijing to halt such sales."

Because some specifics of Chinese arms activities are classified, source reports regarding these activities couldn't be discussed in an open hearing. However, "many of the details are available in the open press, and it is upon these open sources that we have relied exclusively in preparing for today's hearing," said Cochran.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Non-Proliferation Robert Einhorn told the subcommittee that the Clinton administration's goal is to "build a constructive, stable, and mutually beneficial relationship with China, one that's based on shared respect for international norms," one of which is non-proliferation. He explained that the reason why sanctions have been used sparingly against

China, is because certain criteria set in law have not been met in most of the cases of Chinese arms technology transfers to Iran and Pakistan.

Limited probe urged in Louisiana Senate race

Robert F. Bauer and William B. Canfield III, the two counsels hired by the Senate Rules Committee to look into charges by Louisiana Republican Woody Jenkins that Democrat Mary Landrieu won last year's U.S. Senate race in Louisiana through vote fraud, concluded, in a report released on April 8, that Jenkins's charges of vote buying, multiple voting, and fraudulent voter registration were serious enough to warrant a limited investigation into "the sufficiency of the evidence," in all three cases.

However, on the charges of vote hauling, campaign finance violations, phantom voting, and mismatched petition signatures, either the charges did not constitute a "proper basis for investigation," or Jenkins failed to provide sufficient evidence to justify further investigation. Bauer and Canfield are recommending a limited investigation that would require no more than one week on site (in Louisiana).

At a Rules Committee hearing a couple of days later, however, Republicans pushed for a broader investigation, with Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) connecting such a call to the fact that Democrats are pushing for a broader investigation of campaign finance activities during the 1996 election campaigns. Committee Chairman John Warner (R-Va.) concurred, adding, "I'm reluctant to rule out any areas of investigation at this time."