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## national news

### Not without scars

*Senate passage of the Ryan White CARE Act is seen by AIDS activists as a hard-won victory over Jesse Helms*

by Bob Roehr

**T**he Senate passed reauthorization of the Ryan White CARE Act on July 27 by an overwhelming margin of 97-3. Crippling amendments proposed by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) were often defeated, and the one that did pass was subsequently watered down.

AIDS lobbyists greeted the final vote with jubilation. "The clear message is that this is a victory," said Winnie Stachelberg, senior policy analyst with the Human Rights Campaign Fund and co-chair of National Organizations Responding to AIDS. "This is the Congress recognizing and understanding the needs of people living with HIV and AIDS."

"The Senate proved again that AIDS is a national emergency deserving of extraordinary attention," added Cornelius Baker, public policy director of the National Association of People With AIDS.

David Greer, spokesman for Log Cabin Republicans noted that the vote "was even greater than that for the original authorization, when it was 96-4, five years ago under a Democratic-controlled Congress."

But the victory did not come without its scars. Vitriolic anti-gay statements from Helms dominated the floor debate, which began July 21. Helms lambasted "the powerful homosexual lobby" that had "Congress falling all over itself" to do what they were demanding.

He offered a number of potentially crippling amendments. His efforts to freeze funding at current levels for five years went down 32-67.

His amendment pitting people with AIDS against cancer patients failed 15-84. Baker called those votes "a testament to what we were able to do."

The infamous "no-promo-homo" amendment to deny federal funds to any organization portraying homosexuality positively did pass, with a vote of 54-45. But a subsequent amendment which gutted the intent of the Helms measure passed 74-23. It was offered by Sens. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) and Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), the principle sponsors of the bill. The same strategy had been used successfully last year.

"Helms always poses these amendments in such a way that senators find it very difficult to vote against them," said Baker. Stachelberg recalled a similar amendment a year ago which passed with a dozen more votes. "We have never beaten a Helms amendment like this head on," she said, "Clearly we are doing better."

"At least three people who said they were voting against [the no-homo-promo amendment], including at least one who was scheduled to speak against it, voted for it," said Gary Rose, with the AIDS Action Council. He attributes the switched votes to last-minute changes in scheduling that pushed the vote up earlier than expected and led to confusion.

"Some people were obviously looking for

cover," said Greer. Some senators, however, knowing of the planned gutting amendment, might have viewed this vote as a throwaway and voted to improve their rating on future right-wing rating scorecards.

"Voting with Helms showed a level of insensitivity and bigotry," charged Alexander Robinson, National Organizations Responding to AIDS co-chair, who also works on AIDS issues for the American Civil Liberties Union. He was especially "distressed" to see Republican Majority



Leader Robert Dole (Kan.) and 16 Democrats such as Jay Rockefeller (W.V.) among those who voted with Helms on this measure. He has "no idea why they abandoned us."

"We are going to have to go to members, one-on-one, and educate them as to why this undermines the CARE Act," said Stachelberg.

One perennial issue is the call for mandatory HIV testing of pregnant women. The medical theory is that early intervention may reduce the likelihood of transmission to the baby, but the social dynamics are more complex than the medical ones. Kassebaum had indicated her support for such a measure at a July 24 meeting with a half dozen senior AIDS lobbyists. Both the lobbyists and Kassebaum's staff were stunned.

Kassebaum ended up taking a different approach—a carrot instead of a stick. She proposed a \$10 million pot of money that the 11 most highly impacted jurisdictions can tap to fund HIV testing and counseling of pregnant women. It passed by unanimous consent.

Ryan White still faces a floor vote in the House, where it was unanimously reported out of committee. That will probably occur some time in September. It seems likely there will be more attempts to attach negative amendments, but their scope and character remains uncertain.