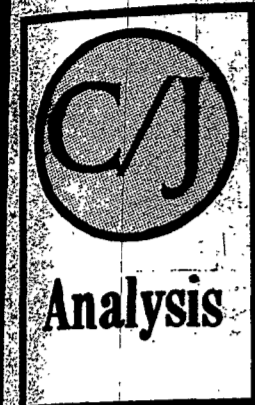


The 95th 'Most Active Religious Lobbyists Say

Religious lobbyists in the nation's capital, who had an intense interest in a broad range of issues confronting lawmakers, agree that the recently concluded 95th Congress was one of the most active in recent years.



Analysis

A spirit of compromise enabled the Congress to produce a heavy volume of legislation — much of it in the last marathon session — and avoid veto showdowns with President Carter.

"Overall results of this year reflect far fewer confrontations between the Congress and the chief executive," said Hyman Bookbinder, Washington representative for the American Jewish Committee and a vigorous proponent of the Humphrey-Hawkins full employment bill, which had broad Christian and Jewish agency support.

He claimed "the government is running better" and quoted the first century Rabbi Hanina: "Pray for the welfare of the government. But for the awe thereof, people would eat each other up alive."

Msgr. Francis Lally, secretary for Social Development and World Peace of the U.S. Catholic Conference, also noted the spirit of compromise in ticking off the positive and negative aspects of some legislation in which his agency had an interest.

The Humphrey-Hawkins bill finally passed, he noted, as a "symbolic step forward," but only after it had been "emasculated" by the Congress.

The bill, known as the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act, was named for the late Sen.

Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) and Rep. Augustus F. Hawkins (D-Calif.). It sets a goal of four per cent unemployment by 1983. But, fearing inflation, Congress stripped it of any funds to make the government an employer of last resort.

The energy package, which Mr. Carter promoted vigorously and over which Congress wrangled for a year and a half, is seen as an accomplishment by Msgr. Lally, "but not the giant step we had expected."

On some measures, there was no compromising. The mainstream religious community gave nearly unanimous backing to the Panama Canal Treaties, which passed after classic nationwide debate. Many also hailed the defeat of lobby disclosure measures which would have had the federal government looking into Sunday collection baskets in the interpretation of many.

Battles over restrictions in government funding for abortion and tax credits for non-public school tuitions were among measures which divided the religious community.

On no other issue did President Carter rely on friends in the Churches as hard as he did on the touch-and-go fight over the Panama Canal treaties.

The President called 28 religious leaders to the White House just prior to final congressional debates on the issue. They expressed their strong support for the treaties.

The religious community was virtually unanimous in opposition to the lobby disclosure bill. John Baker of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs spoke for many when he called the defeat in committee of the bill a major victory for the cause of separation of church and state.

This legislation would have required all organizations, including churches, which attempt to affect national legislation to register and make periodic reports on their activities and expenses.

The Rev. Barry Lynn, Washington representative for the United Church of Christ, said of the bill, "Never in American history has the public witness of the churches and synagogues to the government been so seriously threatened."

Mr. Baker's agency went on record as intending to refuse to cooperate with the new legislation if it were enacted.

The tuition tax credit legislation bitterly divided the religious community. It would have given tax credits to parents of students in private and parochial elementary and secondary schools and colleges.

The Roman Catholic Church, with its wide network of parish schools, vigorously backed the measure. The National Council of Churches fought against it.

Of the tuition tax credit question, Msgr. Lally commented, "We consider tuition tax credits a live issue which will come up in the next Congress."

In this he echoes the sentiments of Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, O.P., general secretary of the USCC, who called the Catholic Church "united on this issue."

Msgr. Wilfrid Paradis, secretary of the USCC Department of Education, said, "We consider this a temporary defeat, and we fully plan to renew the issue in future sessions of Congress."

Opponents of tuition tax credits are also geared for a new battle in the next Congress. Ed Doerr of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, said it was a temporary defeat. He warned, "All who are concerned with defending religious freedom and public education will need to continue their cooperative efforts to see that this unwise plan is never enacted into law."

Another tax issue which was scuttled to make room for Mr. Carter's tax cut package, was the Fisher-Conable bill, designed to separate charitable deductions from the standard deduction on federal income tax forms.

Spurred by considerable loss to charity as more and more people choose to use the standard deduction, Rep. Barber Conable (R-N.Y.) and Rep. Joseph L. Fisher (D-Va.) sought to lessen this impact by making charitable giving a separate deduction, even for those who do not itemize.

The bill would have been a boon to the churches and other charities. William P. Thompson, president of the National Council of Churches, testified before the House Ways and Means Committee in March, "It would behoove Congress to stimulate and encourage charitable giving throughout the nation for the general good of the commonwealth, since it will foster greater citizen initiative and self-reliance and thus strengthen the very fabric of democracy."

The bill was dropped for this session since it was seen as a drain on the Treasury and a drag on the total tax package which took up most of the legislator's precious time in the final hours of the 95th Congress.

Much attention was focused on the Congressional fight to curb Medicaid spending on abortions for poor women. In addition, Congress restricted the way government funds were used for abortions elsewhere.



Photo by Terrance J. Brennan

Speaker

Father James J. Young, chaplain of the North American Conference Separated and Divorced Catholics, spoke to some 200 diocesan Saturday evening at St. John Fisher College. The evening titled "Where are the Divorced Catholics in the Church Today?" was sponsored by the Office of Family Life and the diocesan Advisory Board for the Ministry to the Divorced and Separated.

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