

House Proposals Threaten Pro-Life Drive

Washington (NC) — Pro-life leaders are protesting two proposed rules changes in the House of Representatives which, according to pro-life groups, would make it more difficult for the House to consider new anti-abortion legislation.

The rules changes are "a misguided effort to sidestep basic issues of human rights," said Father Edward Bryce, director of the U.S. bishops Committee for Pro-Life Activities.

Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee, added, "Any congressman who votes for the new House rules is voting to kill all abortion funding restrictions and all pro-life constitutional amendments."

The two rules which have drawn pro-life anger are:

— A proposal to increase the needed number of signatures on a House "discharge petition" from a simple majority of the House (218 members) to a two-thirds majority (290) members whenever the proposed legislation being bottled up in committee is a constitutional amendment.

— A proposal to allow the House to end floor debate on appropriations bills before it gets to consider appropriations "riders," such as amendments prohibiting any funds in the bill from being used for abortions.

Both rules were approved by House Democrats in early

December and are scheduled to be voted on by the full House when the 98th Congress convenes the first week in January. The rules would apply not just to abortion measures but to all legislation, such as constitutional amendments on a balanced budget or appropriations riders on funding for court-ordered busing.

Father Bryce in a Dec. 15 statement indicated he was most concerned about the discharge petition rule, particularly since the Senate is scheduled to debate sometime next year a constitutional amendment on abortion sponsored by Sen. Orrin G. Hatch of Utah.

The House Judiciary Committee traditionally has blocked such amendments from reaching the House floor, forcing pro-life strategists in recent years to consider circulating a discharge petition to get anti-abortion amendments to the full House.

A vote in support of the discharge petition rule change, Father Bryce said, "must be taken as a vote in favor of the status quo on abortion — that is a vote in favor of virtually unrestricted abortion on demand throughout the nine months of pregnancy."

If the rules changes are approved, he added, "the majority of American people which opposes unrestricted abortion will understandably be even more frustrated with and alienated from a Congress which seems dedicated to abdicating its responsibility on

this issue; and the stage will be set for less orderly, more frequent and more emotionally divisive confrontations in Congress which can only further divide and confuse our nation."

Johnson said the discharge petition would "as a practical matter" make it impossible to get any controversial constitutional amendment out of committee. He said the new rule on appropriations riders would make it easy for the House to avoid the abortion issue, and could even jeopardize the Hyde amendment which for the past several years had restricted federal government funding of abortions.

The proposals are "unfair, undemocratic, gag rules," Johnson said.

Both Johnson and Father Bryce urged pro-lifers to ask their congressmen to oppose the new rules.

House Democrats defended the proposed rules as an effort to restore power and efficiency to the House leadership. Republicans have characterized the new rules as "legislative tyranny" and a "power grab."

With the Democrats in a majority, the new rules are expected to be approved by the full House if the Democrats close ranks.

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Father Edward Bryce

Bishops Ask Aid For Migrants

Washington (NC) — The Administrative Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has called for the "continuing commitment of the American people as a whole to alleviate the conditions of the world's homeless."

In a statement issued Dec. 13, in relation to the third annual observance of National Migration Week, Jan 2-8, the committee cited "hundreds of thousands of starving Cambodians who have fled the slaughter... in their shattered homeland," 1.5 million "ethnic Somalis who have fled their tribal lands now under Ethiopian rule," and 1.5 million Afghans "who have struggled over the mountain passes into Pakistan."

The committee also noted the difficulties faced by migrant workers and illegal aliens of all nationalities now residing in the United States.

Decreased government funding is one of the obstacles to ministering to the needs of the world's homeless, the committee said. Such reductions "may affect the degree of participation of the United States in international relief efforts," it said. It added that in the face of such difficulties, "it is imperative that the American Catholics support our longstanding commitment to provide hospitality."

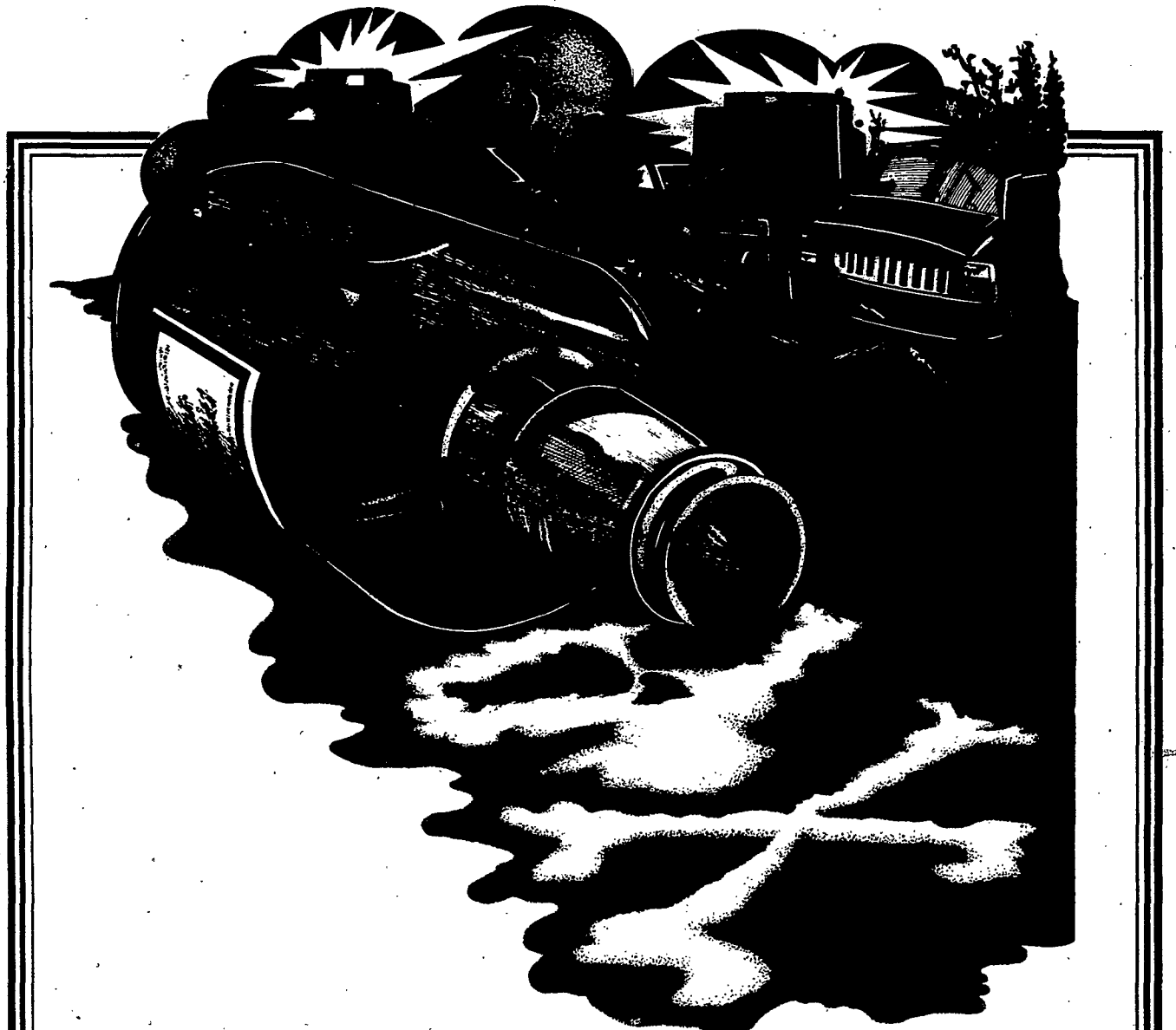
The committee cited three international Catholic agencies through which Catholics may assist refugees:

• Catholic Relief Services, the overseas aid and development agency of U.S. Catholics.

• The Catholic Near East Welfare Association, which "originally grew out of concern of the church for Eastern European and Asian refugees of World War I." Today the association seeks to provide for the spiritual and material well-being of refugees in 18 countries from Palestine to southern India, south to Egypt and Ethiopia, and north from Israel to Greece and the Balkans.

• The International Catholic Migration Commission, which is allied with the U.S. Catholic Conference's Migration and Refugee Services. "Through Migration and Refugee Services," the committee said, "American Catholics have joined hands to resettle annually nearly as many refugees as all other (U.S.) voluntary agencies combined — 57,984 individuals in 1981 alone. This great task is accomplished through a network of 154 diocesan offices which coordinate the talents of hundreds of staff members and thousands of Religious and lay volunteers, and through parish groups and community organizations which band together to sponsor individuals and families arriving in their communities."

Sponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration and Tourism, National Migration Week is intended to generate community support for local refugee programs, to increase community awareness of the refugee resettlement effort, to welcome refugees into communities, and to provide a day for prayer and discussion of the world's refugee problem.



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