

# Senate votes to overturn anti-abortion regulation

WASHINGTON (CNS) — In a July 17 voice vote, the Senate approved a bill overturning a White House regulation prohibiting recipients of federal family planning funds from discussing abortion as a birth control option.

The House approved similar legislation as part of a spending bill in June. The two houses' measures will have to go to a conference committee before a final version can be sent to the White House.

President George Bush has promised to veto any relaxation of the regulation, which affects participants in the Title X family planning program.

Opposing moves to overturn the regulation, the U.S. Catholic Conference's general secretary wrote to Congress, observing that "It is permissible for government to decide to fund family planning, as it has,

without funding abortion related activities." The letter, from Monsignor Robert N. Lynch, said such conditions on the use of federal funds do not violate free-speech rights.

The Senate's July 17 vote followed an unsuccessful attempt the previous day to amend the measure with a compromise introduced by Sen. Dave Durenberger, R-Minn. While continuing to prohibit abortion counseling among Title X agencies, Durenberger's initiative would have allowed staff at Title X program clinics to refer women to other facilities where abortion advice is available.

The Durenberger amendment was killed the previous day in a 64-35 vote.

Critics of the regulation call it a "gag rule" and claim it prohibits doctors from practicing medicine as they see fit.

## Group to address priest shortage

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II has established as a permanent commission the Vatican working group set up last year to address the unequal distribution of priests worldwide.

Cardinal Pio Laghi, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education and leader of the working group, was named president of the commission July 20 when the Vatican announced it would become permanent.

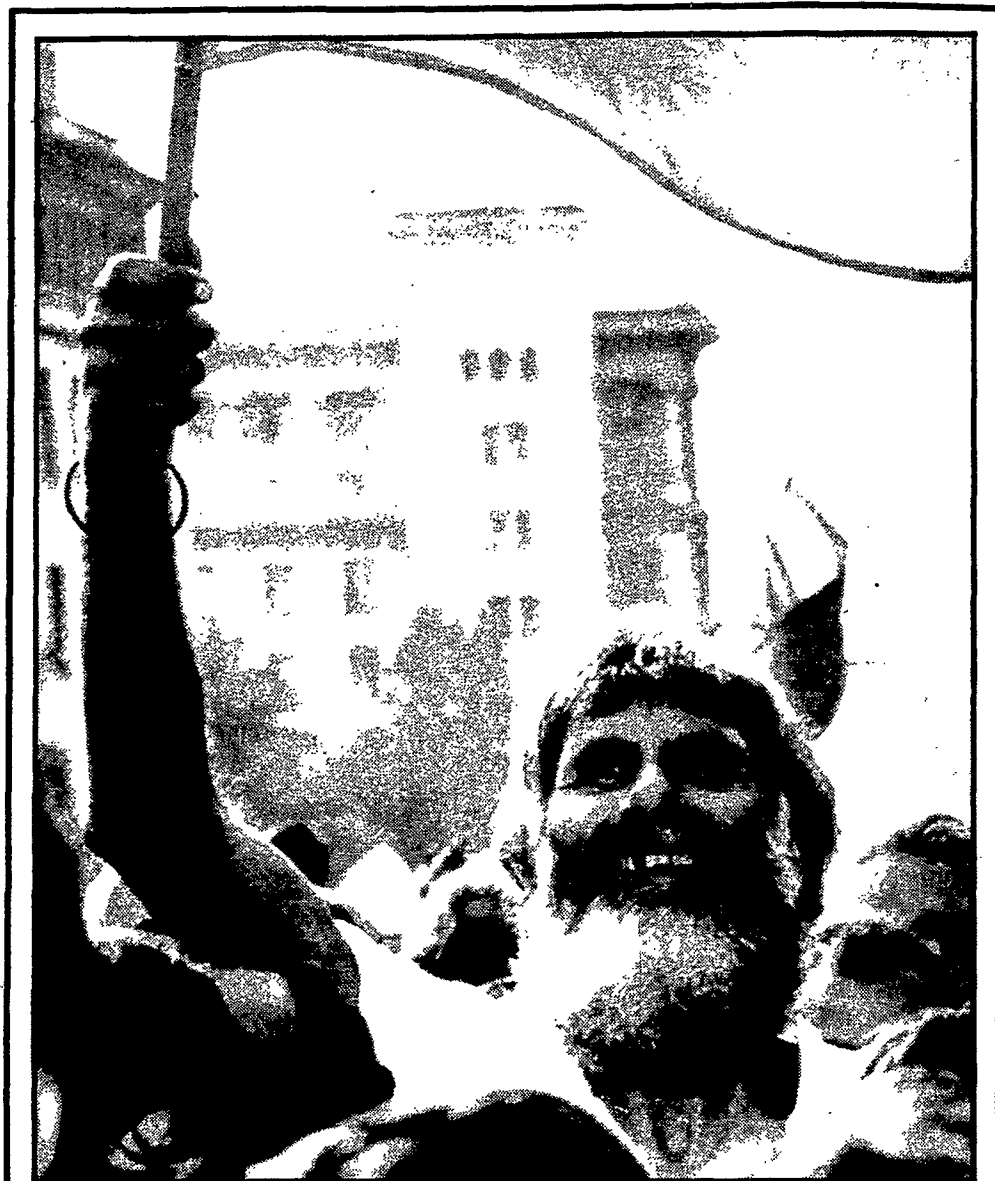
The commission will coordinate programs through which dioceses with high priest-laity ratios would be asked to release teams of clergy for work in dioceses experiencing shortages.

Cardinal Laghi said in June that although

the official mandate from the pope had not been published, the program already was "operative," with an Italian team working in Ecuador and a Colombian team being trained for work in Brazil.

The most dramatic shortage of priests is in Latin America, where more than 88 percent of the population professes Catholicism, he said. Almost 43 percent of the world's Catholics live in the region, but only 13 percent of the world's priests minister there.

The Catholics of Europe and North America constitute less than 39 percent of the world's Catholic population, but are served by more than 73 percent of the world's priests, he said.



AP/Wide World Photos  
**FIRST FOR FREEDOM** — A supporter of the Bulgarian Union Democratic Forces movement waves a flag during a pre-election rally in Sofia, Bulgaria, July 12. Bulgaria became the first member of the former communist Eastern Bloc to adopt a new constitution enshrining its desire to build a free and democratic society.

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By David Warner

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