Washington Update

By Jodi Feldman
Washington Correspondent

Veto expected on family leave act

The House of Representatives in November voted 253 to 177 in favor of the AAP-backed Family and Medical Leave Act -- legislation which guarantees employees up to 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave in connection with the birth, adoption or serious illness of a child, spouse or parent. Employers with fewer than 50 employees would be exempt from the law.

Similar legislation passed overwhelmingly in the Senate in October. President Bush threatens to veto the bill, arguing that it places burdensome mandates on American business. While the Senate vote was enough to override a presidential veto, the House vote fell short of the two-thirds majority needed. Last year, a similar measure passed in Congress and was vetoed by the President.

In a statement to Congress, officials of the president's Office of Management and Budget said: "The Administration believes, however, that this objective can best be achieved voluntarily through employee-employer negotiations or the normal collective bargaining process between management and labor, not by the government mandating employee benefits."

"Mandated family and medical leave legislation would:

- "reduce the flexibility necessary to meet the needs of a changing workforce and undermine the current trend toward flexible benefit policies;
- encourage employers to reduce overall employee benefits by limiting voluntary benefits in order to afford new, mandatory family and medical leave benefits;"
- "impose the costs of leave on employers regardless of their ability to absorb such costs, thus reducing their productivity and U.S. competitiveness. The impact on small business would be onerous."

Some advocates of the bill, and critics of the president's domestic policy said that the President should welcome the opportunity to approve this bill in an effort to countercharges that he lacks interest in domestic affairs.

"The President might change his mind about opposing the bill ... to demonstrate some concern in domestic affairs," said Rep. William Clay (D-Mo.). Rep. Clay was one of the original sponsors of the family and medical leave legislation.

Congressional supporters of the bill, including conservative Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), argued that the bill represents the opportunity to approve a modest family and medical leave proposal.

"Here is legislation that in a small way helps reinforce the family by humanizing the relationship between the employer and the employee," Hyde said during debate on the House floor. "Capitalism with a human face is an imperative, needs."

Barring a reversal of the President's position, the Family and Medical Leave Act is expected to die with the promised veto.

The bill's supporters say they are determined not to give up. The Senate and House still need to meet to work out some minor differences in their versions of the bill before it goes to the President. Congressional leaders already have suggested that they might delay sending the bill to the President until next year. Otherwise, they fear the president will "pocket veto" the bill, leaving it unsigned until Congress' winter recess.

For more information on the current status of the bill, contact Randy Moore, in the AAP Department of Government Liaison.

 Debate continues over HIV testing

The American Medical Association in November broke with most medical specialty groups and AIDS activists by supporting U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) plans to develop a list of HIV exposure-prone, invasive procedures.

Dozens of representatives of medical specialty groups met in November at the CDC to discuss development of the list.

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Vice presidential candidates give biographies

Editor's note: The National Nominating Committee has named Betty Lowe, M.D., and Maurice Edward Keenan, M.D., as candidates for AAP vice president. The winner of the election, which will be held this spring, will take office during the 1992 Annual Meeting. Ultimately, the winner will serve as 1993-94 AAP president. In this first installment of election coverage, each candidate has provided a brief biography.

Maurice Edward Keenan, M.D.

I have been a pediatrician in private practice for 25 years. My residency was served at Boston City Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital. Born in Schenectady, New York in 1935, I attended Middlebury College, Albany Medical College and the Harvard School of Public Health from which I received an M.P.H. I served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1969.

I am director of the Myelodysplastic Clinic at the Massachusetts General Hospital where I am attending pediatrician and assistant clinical professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School. I am involved in the education of students and residents both in the hospital and private office setting.

My activities with the American Academy of Pediatrics include various committee assignments. At present, I chair the Board Committee on Finance. I have served as the Massachusetts Chapter President and currently, I am the chair of District 1.

At the community level, my activities have been directed toward the repeal of religious exemption laws and the development of an outreach program called "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" for homeless adolescents. Reducing homelessness among adolescents has been a commitment for the past 20 years. This project is an on-going program which seeks causes of homelessness and tries to establish workable solutions.

Betty Lowe, M.D.

I am professor of Pediatrics, University of Arkansas School of Medicine, medical director of Arkansas Children's Hospital and associate professor of Pediatrics at University of Arkansas Medical Center. I was chief of pediatrics, Willey Hospital; president, Miller County Medical Society; trustee, St. Michael's Hospital; chief of staff, Southern Clinic; president, Bowie-Miller County Health Planning Board and a member of the Junior League. I helped develop a Regional Medical Program Grant to regionalize newborn care in 16 counties.

Following my return to academics, I have been a board member of Arkansas Advocates for Children; national trustee of NACHRI; ACH chief of staff and as Chairman of the Governor's Task Force on Newborn Care, I helped establish regionalization of newborn care and the first Level III Nursery in Arkansas. I am secretary of Alderage/Med Camps and serve on Immunization and "Medical Home" Task Forces for the Arkansas Legislative Health Care Access Council.

I have been in the Academy, I have been president, Arkansas Chapter; and House of Delegates delegate. See Lowe, p. 28

A New Look

Look for some changes in the format of AAP News starting with the January 1992 issue. Beginning with that issue, AAP News will regularly feature color photographs and artwork, as well as advertisements interspersed throughout the newspaper. In addition, AAP News will be published on a higher quality newspaper stock and will be stapled. All of these changes should make for easier reading. Please let us know what you think of these changes -- and, as always, please let us know about other suggestions you have to further improve AAP News. Call the editor at (800) 433-9016, ext. 7875.