

12 SENATE CONSERVATIVES LAUNCH THEIR OWN WELFARE-REFORM PLAN IMMIGRANTS AND UNWED TEENAGE MOTHERS ARE TARGETED. AMONG THE BACKERS: PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL PHIL GRAMM.

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Body

Senate conservatives announced their own plan yesterday to dismantle more than 150 antipoverty programs, putting new pressure on Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole to overcome the Republican divisions on welfare.

Among the dozen backers of the new bill is Sen. Phil Gramm, a Texan and Dole's rival for the GOP presidential nomination. Gramm's involvement spotlights the extent of the Republicans' differences and injects a dose of presidential politics into the welfare debate.

Gramm and the others attacked a bill passed by the Senate Finance Committee with the support of Dole. "Our goal is to stand up for what our party believes in," Gramm said.

The conservatives' plan would crack down on immigrants and unmarried teenage mothers who get welfare, while giving states responsibility for a \$100 billion array of cash, job training, housing, foster care, child care and nutrition programs. It also would require 75 percent of able-bodied welfare recipients to work.

"We are literally lifting thousands of strings that the federal government now imposes on welfare as it is constructed in our states," said Gramm. "This will unleash creativity in the states, it will give the states the ability to experiment."

Gramm and other conservatives blocked Senate debate on welfare earlier this summer when they complained that the GOP's original plan did nothing to discourage teenagers from having children out of wedlock.

A fight between lawmakers from the Sunbelt and the North and Midwest over that bill's formula for dividing welfare dollars has also roiled the Senate. Moderate Republicans, meanwhile, oppose the conservative push to cut off cash payments to teenage mothers and children born while their mothers are on welfare.

The House passed its measure in March.

FLAG AMENDMENT. The Senate Judiciary Committee voted 12-6 yesterday for a constitutional amendment to curtail desecration of the flag.

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Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California and Howell Heflin of Alabama joined 10 Republicans in supporting the proposal. Six Democrats opposed the amendment.

The amendment already passed the House by a 312-120 vote, more than the two-thirds majority necessary. If the Senate approves, three-quarters of the states would have to ratify the language within seven years.

The measure would permit Congress and states to enact laws to ban flag desecration. The bill is a reaction to recent Supreme Court rulings that threw out such laws as a violation of constitutional protections of free speech.

IMMIGRATION OVERHAUL. The most dramatic overhaul of immigration policy in 30 years, including stringent border controls and significantly lower limits on legal immigration, was approved yesterday by the House Judiciary subcommittee on immigration.

After four days of wrangling with mostly technical amendments, the panel sent the 300-plus-page bill to the full committee relatively unchanged. The committee is expected to take it up after the August recess.

In addition to politically popular measures clamping down on illegal immigrants, the bill would reduce from about 830,000 to 585,000 the number of foreigners eligible for legal entry. It also would restrict visas to highly skilled workers and the spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens and legal residents.

MEDICARE CUTS. The Clinton administration's top Medicare official told Republican lawmakers yesterday that cutting \$270 billion from the program would mean higher costs or fewer benefits for America's elderly.

But Republicans said they were being responsible by giving senior citizens more choices about health insurance and trying to fix Medicare, which is heading for financial ruin early in the 21st century.

Medicare is shaping up as a big political battle, with Republicans trying to emphasize the need to slow spending and balance the budget in seven years and Democrats accusing the Republicans of raiding Medicare to pay for tax cuts for upper-income Americans.

Neither the House nor the Senate has made public its Medicare proposals, but the Republicans are moving toward replacing traditional Medicare with a program that would give senior citizens vouchers to buy their own health insurance.

Medicare administrator Bruce Vladeck told the House Ways and Means health subcommittee that, given inflation projections and the limits set in the Republican budget plan, there is no way they can make sure vouchers pay for the care. Vladeck said beneficiaries would face the choice of paying more or getting less.

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