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**Issues Before Congress
Evoke Church Interest**

WASHINGTON (BP)--Legislation involving questions of church concern loom large on the horizon of the second session of the 89th Congress, in spite of the overshadowing Vietnam situation.

Of interest and concern to all is the quest for peace. The "Christmas truce," the "peace offensive" of suspension of bombing of north Vietnam the diplomatic maneuvers viewed as efforts toward peace, all have encouragement of various religious groups. Congress is put in the position of resolving its dual commitments--military assistance in Viet Nam and continued development of the "Great Society" on the domestic scene.

The issues are abundant. Among them are the food for peace program, measures aimed at rehabilitating drug addicts in which churches could play a leading role, repeal of section 14(B) of the Taft-Hartley Act and a possible "religious exemption" clause, revision and broadening of the unemployment compensation system which could involve religious organizations and institutions, and measures designed to improve conditions for migrant farm workers.

Still other issues include possible new proposals to make southern juries more representative and to protect civil rights workers from violence, renewing and extending some education programs, administration of education programs and medicare, and the possibility of some form of birth control program.

Of major importance is a review of the food for peace program which expires at the end of this year. This program provides for the sale of surplus foods to other countries for "soft" (non-convertible) currencies and the outright donation of food in some cases. Voluntary church agencies, and such organizations as care, are involved in cooperative efforts with the U. S. government in distributing food and other necessities in other countries.

Increasing demands for U. S. food from a hungry world, and the dwindling government-owned food surpluses make re-evaluation of the program necessary. Observers agree that any future food program probably would put less emphasis on disposing of surpluses and place more emphasis on a sound program of stepped-up food production to help others.

The day after Congress opened, hearings were held by a house judiciary committee on measures aimed at rehabilitating drug addicts. Various bills were introduced during the first session of Congress. Generally these would authorize civil commitment of narcotics addicts rather than a prison sentence, and provide treatment centers and rehabilitation programs. Churches could have leading roles in the rehabilitation efforts.

The fight to repeal "right-to-work" laws is expected to resume in this session of Congress. Section 14(B) of the Taft-Hartley Act permits states to allow non-union workers the right to work in a shop that has been organized by a union. Efforts have been made to provide an exemption from "coerced" membership in a union for those who object on religious grounds.

Congressional action is expected on an administration proposal for revisions in the federal-state unemployment compensation system. Included would be extension of employment compensation coverage and increased employer taxes. Undertermined at this point is whether or not this would involve religious organizations and institutions.

The Teacher Corps was established by the Higher Education Act of 1965 but funds were not provided before Congress adjourned. Efforts will be made to get the authorized funds to put this program in operation. The Teacher Corps would provide faculty assistance for schools in impoverished areas.

Other education items facing the Congress will be renewal of the formula for allocation of funds for federal grants to school districts with large numbers of children from low-income families (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965), extension of the library services and construction program, extension of the federal aid for school construction in federally impacted areas, and extension of the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 which provides grants and loans for construction of graduate and undergraduate facilities.

The Senate judiciary committee has scheduled hearings in February on a "judicial review" bill which would affect all major education legislation.

A bill was introduced in the House to strike the controversial provisions of the Medicare program which require a disclaimer of Communist affiliation from applicants under the health insurance program. Another aspect of the Medicare program came to light in an announcement that a consultant will travel throughout the country "contacting church and civic groups to enlist their support in informing senior citizens" of their eligibility for the program. This is a part of the "medical alert program."

The explosive issue of the government's participation in birth control activities may face the new session of Congress. The issue was sparked last year in President Johnson's State of the Union message. Senate hearings were held on a bill which would make birth control information available to states and foreign governments which request it. Speculation is that the administration might propose some form of birth control program in 1966. The Roman Catholic Church has strongly opposed any such program.

Certain Congressional committees will also be involved in non-legislative studies during the year. Investigation of "extreme groups" is expected to include "hate groups" with particular interest in the John Birch Society and the use of radio and television by various right-wing and left-wing groups.

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\$500,000 Gift To Mercer
For Science Building

1-13-66

MACON, Ga. (BP)--Mercer University has received a \$500,000 gift for construction of a science facility costing approximately \$1.5 million.

President Rufus C. Harris, in announcing the gift from an unnamed source, said construction should start about April 1.

The science facility was involved in a church-state separation debate at the November sessions of the Georgia Baptist Convention which operated the college.

The convention turned down a Mercer request for permission to borrow \$500,000 from a federal agency, opponents contending the interest rate involved a government subsidy. The university was instructed to borrow the money in the commercial market.

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