The Reagan Administration has assigned a high priority to ending the ban on covert operations in Angola. But the Congress is putting up a fight, in what promises to be one of the most controversial foreign policy battles this year. The Reagan Administration has requested repeal of the Clark Amendment -- which the Congress passed in 1976 to require Congressional approval of any military aid to any group in Angola -- as part of the fiscal year 1982 foreign aid authorization bill. Already, both the House and Senate foreign affairs committees have refused the Administration what it wants.

House Committee Votes to Retain Clark Amendment

The toughest challenge to Reagan's request on Angola has come from the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The Africa Subcommittee, ably chaired by Michigan Congressman Howard Wolpe, grilled Administration witnesses in two April hearings on the rationale for repealing the Clark Amendment in the face of overwhelming opposition from independent Africa. Refusing to rule out the option of covert intervention in Angola if the Clark Amendment were repealed, State Department officials said that the President wanted to eliminate all restrictions on his conduct of foreign policy as a matter of principle. The Subcommittee rejected this argument, and voted unanimously on April 29 to strike the repeal of the Clark Amendment from the foreign aid bill. Even the ranking Subcommittee Republican, William Goodling, and Minnesota Republican Arlen Erdahl came back from the Geneva conference on African refugees convinced that repeal of the Clark Amendment at this time was a big mistake.

On May 12 the full Foreign Affairs Committee voted by a wide margin of 19 to 5 to sustain the Subcommittee's recommendation. Every Democrat present voted to support the Clark Amendment; the Republicans split on the issue four to five, with Representatives Fenwick (N.J.), Leach (Iowa), Erdahl (Minn.) and Snowe (Maine) voting in favor of the Clark Amendment.

Senate Committee Fashions a Compromise

In the more conservative, Republican-controlled Senate, supporters of the Clark Amendment confronted a more difficult situation. In a long and complicated session in the Foreign Relations Committee on May 13, Chairman Charles Percy (R-Ill.) introduced weak language repealing the Clark Amendment but saying that this should not be construed as an endorsement by the Congress of military assistance to any insurgent group in Angola. Percy's amendment went on to require a confidential Presidential report to both foreign affairs committees if he decided to give aid to any group in Angola. Senator Tsongas and his Democratic Committee colleagues convinced Percy to agree to add to his amendment a statement that the Presidential report -- filed prior to any aid being furnished to an Angola group -- must contain "a determination that substantial progress, including an effective
cease fire and preparations for internationally supervised elections, has been made" in Namibia. This Percy-Tsongas language was adopted by the Committee by a vote of 12 to 2, with only Republican Senators Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas (the chairwoman of the Africa Subcommittee) and S.I. Hayakawa of California voting in the negative.

The Next Round of Votes in the Congress

We expect votes on Angola in both the full House and the full Senate when the foreign aid bill goes to the floor in both chambers sometime in late June or mid-July. Representative Derwinski (R-Ill.) plans to offer a floor amendment, probably reinserting repeal of the Clark Amendment in the bill. On the Senate side, Administration officials have said that they plan to try to strike the Percy-Tsongas language on the floor, leaving only the Clark Amendment repeal.

Therefore, our strategy is to focus maximum attention on the full membership of the House of Representatives to insure that the Foreign Affairs Committee's vote to retain the Clark Amendment is upheld on the floor. Senate Democrats will try to preserve the Committee-passed compromise in the full Senate. If these things can be accomplished, we can go into the conference committee (comprised of selected members of the House and Senate foreign affairs committees) from a position of strength in the House to argue for retention of the Clark Amendment.

What You Can Do

The legislative battle on the Clark Amendment will be the one major southern Africa policy debate in the Congress this year. So it is critically important that citizens who oppose the Reagan Administration tilt toward South Africa and its interventionist policy in the Third World weigh in strongly on this issue.

The Washington Office on Africa has been in the forefront of the campaign to prevent repeal of the Clark Amendment. Many other groups have gotten involved at the national level, and lots of important work has also been done by constituents of House and Senate committee members, resulting in a defeat for the Reagan Administration. The most difficult battles still lie ahead, so the next six weeks will be a critically important time for your input. Here is what you can do to help:

1. At the very least, please write to your Congressional representative urging him or her to vote to retain the Clark Amendment. Stress the strong, bipartisan support for this position in the Foreign Affairs Committee, and refer to the enclosed background material for suggested arguments. Send us a copy of your letter and any response that you get. Write to your Senators too to express your support for retention of the Clark Amendment and urge them, at a minimum, to oppose any floor amendment further weakening or deleting the conditions on intervention in Angola agreed to by the Foreign Relations Committee.

2. Urge groups of which you are a member or some of your friends to write letters too. Even a dozen well-written, thoughtful letters from a Congressional district on this issue could make a big difference.

3. If at all possible, meet personally with your Representative in the House (and your Senators, too, if you can) in his or her local office to explain your support for the Clark Amendment and to assess his or her position.

4. If you need more resources on this issue, we can send you a Resource Packet on Angola and the Clark Amendment with recent news clippings and statements by African leaders for $1.50 (including postage). Additional copies of this Action Alert and background resource piece are available at cost.