

Assassination Probers May Oust Sprague

By TIM WYNGAARD
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WASHINGTON — The price for continuing the House assassination probe may be the dismissal of its controversial chief counsel, House Democratic sources said today.

Democratic leaders are maneuvering to keep the committee alive under tight control despite claims by Rep. Robert E. Bauman, R-Md., the panel's chief foe, that he has succeeded in killing the investigation into the deaths of John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Committee members are being told by caucus leaders that the only way possible to save the committee may be to get rid of staff chief, Richard A. Sprague, who has demanded complete control of an unlimited investigation.

The committee will have to accept tight limitation on the scope of its work and a budget far smaller than the \$6.5 million a year Sprague has asked for a two-year study, members are being told.

Democratic leaders yesterday dropped plans to seek immediate authorization along the lines asked by



SPRAGUE



BAUMAN

At odds over death probe.

Sprague. They delayed a vote until next week and began spreading word that the committee and Sprague's

oppose yesterday's vote. Many Democrats warned their leaders they could not support Sprague's plans for the investigation.

Democrats disputed Bauman's contention that blocking the expected approval yesterday showed that opponents of the committee have the votes necessary to kill it.

Rep. Jim Wright of Texas, Democratic floor leader, said the delay came only because lawmakers on both sides were unhappy over a proposed time limit that would have restricted debate to 20 minutes on each side of the question.

Full debate is expected to be allowed when the measure does reach the floor, Wright said. But amendments are expected to cut the proposed budget and restrict some investigative techniques proposed by Sprague and his staff, he added.

Sprague, a former Pennsylvania assistant district attorney who headed the investigation that led to the murder conviction of former United Mine Workers President W. A. "Tony" Boyle, has proposed secret taping and listening devices for his investigators.

Sprague also has demanded complete control over the investigation, with committee members exercising only veto power rather than directing him in the inquiry.

The resolution authorizing continuation of the committee — which legally died at the end of the last Congress — would expand the committee's power and allow it to extend its investigation into any area it wished.

It also would allow staffers to put witnesses under oath and take testimony at will without lawmakers in attendance.

Both proposals have drawn stiff House opposition, as has a third Sprague move to allow worldwide travel by committee investigators.

Sprague's staff insists the travel provision is necessary because one of the Dallas Parkland Memorial Hospital physicians who treated Kennedy in the emergency room after he was shot has moved from Dallas to South Africa.

"But with Sprague running that staff the way he is, he could send people into Cuba or the Soviet Union, rattling those cages, without any OK from us," said one committee member.

Others, particularly Republicans who spent an hour in a closed caucus debating the matter yesterday, fear the unlimited investigation may turn into a "witchhunt" against the FBI and CIA.

Sprague demanded autonomy in running the investigation when he accepted the chief counsel post late last year, and has warned repeatedly that he will quit if his powers are limited greatly.

He could not be reached for comment. House members are being told by Democratic leaders that they would not be unhappy if Sprague does quit, so a less controversial — and less outspoken — chief counsel more inclined toward accepting directions from committee members could be appointed.

Rep. Henry Gonzalez, D-Tex., who would become the committee's new chairman, has disassociated himself from Sprague's comments about the investigative techniques to be used.

And Gonzalez privately is working with House leaders on a budget that would halve Sprague's proposed figure of \$6.5 million annually.