

Senate Panel Is Planning Abbreviated CIA Charter

4/18/80
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The Senate Intelligence Committee plans to abandon its controversial charter bill for the CIA and rush into markup sessions next week with an abbreviated new proposal.

Backstage negotiations with the Carter administration over the shape of the new bill, especially the extent of congressional oversight of intelligence activities, were reportedly still under way, but sources said yesterday that final agreement is expected shortly.

The committee does not intend to hold any hearings on the substitute proposal for fear that any further delay will wipe out any chance for enactment this year.

"The objective all along has been to get a bill to the floor by the end of the month," one source said. "If we don't, there's very little likelihood we'll get anything at all."

The original 172-page proposal, introduced Feb. 8 by Sen. Walter D. Huddleston (D-Ky.) after several years of dickerings with the administration, was assailed from all sides. Critics of the CIA denounced the extent of intrusive spying that it would permit, along with other provisions that would cloak the CIA with more secrecy than ever. Advocates of a freer hand for the agency maintained that the bill was still too restrictive.

The contents of the new proposal have yet to be disclosed, but they are expected to include some sort of cut-back in the Freedom of Information Act, criminal penalties for disclosing the names of CIA operatives, and less reporting to Congress about the CIA's covert actions.

Sources said that some provisions designed to reinforce the rights of Americans against intrusive spying

may also be included in an effort to allay the fears of civil libertarians.

Markup sessions have been scheduled for next Wednesday and Thursday, on the theory that the new bill is simply an "edited version" of Huddleston's proposal.

Huddleston was not available for comment, but in the past he has voiced fears that Congress would simply enact piecemeal measures designed to satisfy the CIA's demands for greater secrecy if a more comprehensive proposal, setting rules for the U.S. intelligence community, fell by the wayside.

The administration, with the CIA serving as its spokesman, opposed Huddleston's original bill primarily because it would have required prior notice to the Senate and House Intelligence committees of CIA covert actions and because it would have guaranteed the two committees access to whatever after-the-fact information they might demand to insure adequate congressional oversight.

"It's still in a state of flux," one source said of the new proposal, "but I doubt they'd schedule markup sessions unless they were fairly sure they could work something out."