

Blind Is Drawn Until November On CIA Measure

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The CIA's controversial "names of agents" bill was sidetracked yesterday, at least until Congress comes back for a lame-duck session.

Advocates of the measure, which would make it a crime to disclose the names of U.S. intelligence operatives abroad, had been hoping to send it to the White House before the early campaign-year recess. But disputes over the bill's constitutionality have yet to be resolved.

Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) said that he favors "legislation in this field," but indicated that it was impossible to bring it to the floor now. The Senate Intelligence and Senate Judiciary committees have reported out sharply differing versions.

Some fireworks may yet take place on the House floor, where the measure is scheduled for debate this afternoon.

Opponents who contend the bill is unconstitutional plan a concerted attack on provisions that would make it a felony to disclose any information, even from public documents, that serves to identify a covert agent.

Some House members want to make the bill even tougher. Rep. Jerome Ambro (D-N.Y.) said he intends to propose that offenses by government officials with direct access to the names of agents be made the equivalent of treason, punishable by death.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.), a leading opponent of the bill, asked Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) yesterday morning to take the House version off the schedule on the grounds that its passage would be pointless.

In a letter to the speaker, Rodino pointed out that negotiations were under way between the Senate and the administration over a bill that all sides could accept. Rodino also said the administration does not want the House bill because it would require proof of an "intent to impair or impede" U.S. intelligence activities before journalists or other "outsiders" could be successfully prosecuted.

The Justice Department has contended that requirement of intent would make enforcement too difficult.

Aides to the speaker said last evening that the bill was still on the House schedule for today, but pointed out that the press of other legislation may keep it from coming up in any case.