

House seeks watchdog panel on U.S. intelligence abuses

FPush 11/31/77

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a watchdog panel already functioning in the Senate, a fresh effort is scheduled to be made Monday to give the House a role in overseeing U.S. government intelligence operations.

Rep. Les Aspin, D-Wis., said he would introduce a resolution to create a permanent intelligence committee as a counterpart to the Senate committee established last spring.

A similar proposal in the House last year failed after a special House committee, investigating abuses by the CIA and other intelligence-gathering agencies, suffered severe embarrassment because of unauthorized disclosures of its findings.

Aspin, a sponsor of last year's bill, took note of criticism that a permanent intelligence committee might only increase the likelihood of government secrets being leaked. However, he said such fears have been dispelled by the Senate panel's success in avoiding such problems.

The extent of House support for a permanent committee is unclear, but there appears to be little enthusiasm anywhere on Capitol Hill for a joint committee, sometimes suggested as a possible alternative to having separate panels with largely duplicated responsibilities in each house.

The joint committee concept is preferred by many intelligence officials, who argue that it would limit

the number of individuals with access to sensitive or classified data, and would require less time to be spent giving briefings or testifying in hearings.

Aspin said he felt that with a lessening of the furor over the abuses exposed last year, the time has come for "systematic oversight" of the intelligence community.

"With a fulltime committee and staff keeping watch over the intelligence flock, it is less likely that the kinds of abuses exposed will recur," he said.

As is the case with the Senate committee, Aspin's proposed House panel could not declassify information over the President's objections, but would be empowered to refer disputes over declassification to the full House, which would have final say.

Neither would it be able to approve or reject covert operations, but as in the case of the Senate, agency heads would be expected to keep the panel "fully and currently informed" about continuing and anticipated operations.

The House committee would authorize appropriations for all intelligence agencies and the intelligence-gathering functions of other agencies, with exclusive jurisdiction over the CIA and shared jurisdiction with other committees over other intelligence agencies.