

# JFK Records Bill Runs Into Logjam On Capitol Hill

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By George Lardner Jr.  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The JFK records bill, warmly embraced by Democrats and Republicans alike, is in trouble on Capitol Hill.

The Senate passed it on July 27. The House passed another version on Aug. 12. But so far, as one House staffer put it yesterday, "all you have is two bills passing each other in the night."

With less than two weeks to go before a scheduled adjournment, conferees have not even been appointed to discuss the differences. The jockeying has been so complicated that the House bill was not formally sent over to the Senate until late yesterday afternoon.

The logjam, however, may have been broken yesterday when House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks (D-Tex.) indicated in a statement that he might relent on the key issue. He said he was "committed to seeing a bill enacted into law before the end of this Congress."

Both measures would require disclosure of government records concerning the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, but they have become embroiled in the ongoing dispute over the independent counsel law, due to expire this year unless Congress renews it.

The big difference in the bills is in the method of appointing a five-member review board to preside over the release of the documents.

The House, taking its cue from Brooks, has called for the appointments to be made by the judges of the special, three-member court that names independent counsels in criminal cases involving high government officials. The Bush administration contends such an approach could be unconstitutional and the Justice Department has indicated it might recommend a veto if Congress insists on it.

The Senate measure provides for presidential appointment and Senate confirmation of review board members. The Justice Department has said it would recommend that President Bush sign this bill.

Brooks has strongly favored judicial appointment of review board members, arguing that they are the kind of "inferior officers" the Supreme Court had in mind when it upheld the independent counsel law four years ago. Brooks said the House bill was aimed at lifting "the cloud cast over" the Warren Commission by setting up a review panel free of "any possible political taint."

On the other side of the fence, congressional staffers say, is Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), who reportedly is concerned about getting the independent counsel law renewed. Levin is chairman of the Senate subcommittee in charge of the law.

Brooks said the president and Senate "seem intent on replicating" a system of appointment that ultimately led to demands for the bill, but added that "the method of appointment should not by itself hold up this most important piece of legislation."

Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio), a key author of the Senate-passed bill, said he hoped that given the short congressional schedule Brooks would agree to it without a Senate-House conference.