

House Votes to Eliminate Technology Research Office

Outcome Disputed After Roll Call Is Cut Off

By Kenneth J. Cooper
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The House yesterday narrowly backed elimination of the Office of Technology Assessment, 214 to 213, on a disputed roll call that the Republican presiding officer cut off as two Democratic supporters of the congressional research unit scrambled to cast their votes.

The early termination of the close roll call by Rep. John Linder (R-Ga.) prompted threats from angry Democrats and swift moves by Republicans to adjourn for the day amid bedlam on the House floor. Democratic leaders said they would seek another roll call today, charging that Reps. Thomas M. Foglietta (D-Pa.) and Earl F. Hilliard (D-Ala.) had been unfairly denied the right to vote.

"The whole question of voting integrity is at stake here," said Rep. Vic Fazio (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Democratic Caucus.

Foglietta and Hilliard maintained they were below the House rostrum reaching for cards to vote manually when Linder announced the result.

Linder said he did not see any members in what is known as "the well" when the time allotted ran out.

Based on a videotape of House proceedings, neither account is entirely accurate, but Linder does appear to conclude the roll call 15 seconds early, and first Hilliard, then Foglietta rush into the well as the allotted 17 minutes expired. Loud shouts of "one more" from Democrats could be heard as the two lawmakers arrived.

House members are allowed 15 minutes to vote electronically and another two minutes to vote manually.

Two persons reported seeing a frustrated Hilliard jamming his automatic voting card in a machine that had been turned off after 15 minutes. One reporter said Linder ended the roll call after Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) stared at the rostrum and shouted, "Tell him to call it!" stamping his feet for emphasis.

Republican leadership aides insisted that Linder announced the vote after the official tally clerk advised him 17 minutes and 10 seconds had elapsed. "That's what guides the person in the chair," said Ed Gillespie, spokesman

for Majority Leader Richard K. Arme (R-Tex.).

When Democrats controlled the House, they sometimes held close roll calls open for 20 to 25 minutes waiting for members to show up or change their votes. Republicans denounced the extended roll calls as unfair. The new GOP majority announced in January that roll calls would be regularized and last 17 minutes.

The 214 to 213 vote killed an amendment, sponsored by Rep. Amo Houghton (R-N.Y.), that would have preserved OTA, but would have cut its budget from \$22 million to \$15 million and transferred its functions to the Congressional Research Service, part of the Library of Congress.

The Office of Technology Assessment, established in 1972, conducts a broad range of scientific research for congressional committees. Critics say its studies have often been completed after related legislation has passed.

The legislative branch appropriations bill would abolish OTA and eliminate its 200 jobs. Houghton's amendment to preserve the agency's functions was initially approved, 228 to 201, with support from 180 Democrats and 48 Republicans. But House Budget Committee Chairman John R. Kasich (R-Ohio) said Houghton's amendment did not go far enough and GOP leaders wanted to change the outcome on the second roll call because "we've got to pull some things out by the roots."