

Citizen Query Right Gets Okay in House

By BILL LYNCH

(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE — The House today voted 93 to 4 in favor of a resolution giving citizens on the Mafia investigating committee the authority to ask questions of witnesses.

The House acted on a resolution by Rep. J. Luke LeBlanc of Lafayette and a number of senators which earlier passed the Senate 36 to 2. It had narrowly gotten out of a House committee on an 8 to 7 vote yesterday, but won overwhelming support on the House floor.

Rep. Robert Munson of Cheneyville, floor leader for the administration, advised the House that Gov. John J. McKeithen was throwing his weight behind the resolution because the public sentiment demanded citizen members be given the right to interrogate witnesses.

"WE HAVE TO have the wholehearted confidence of the public in this commission if we are going to clear the air," Munson said. "We discussed this with the governor this morning and he agrees this is something we should do."

Rep. Edward F. LeBreton Jr., of New Orleans said that in view of the demand of the public for laymen to ask questions the issue outweighs any legal problems.

He said one man has refused to serve on the committee because he said he did not want to be muzzled.

THE INVESTIGATING committee is composed of

seven legislators and nine citizen advisers (seven have accepted posts). However, under terms of the original resolution creating the committee it has been interpreted that only lawmakers may quiz witnesses.

House Speaker John Garrett also advised the committee that one member has refused to serve, indicating that George Shannon, editor of the Shreveport Journal had declined. Shannon has been Gar-

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rett's choice to fill a spot dedicated to a newspaper editor from north Louisiana but has never been officially named by the speaker.

REP. CLYDE F. Bel of New Orleans, one of four law-

makers to vote against the resolution, recited the opposition of LSU law School Dean Paul M. Hebert and committee Chairman Sen. Adrian G. Duplantier. He said they feared it would cast a cloud over the committee.

Rep. Parey Branton of Shongaloo brought up the prospects of the entire legislature sitting in on the executive session at which Chandler has agreed to testify. It was Branton who reported the compromise agreement in the federal court.



—AP WIREPHOTO.

SEN. ADRIAN G. DUPLANTIER, left, chairman of the Legislative Mafia Investigating Committee, talks with newsmen as Life writer DAVID L. CHANDLER listens. Chandler was in federal court here to avoid testifying before the committee in connection with his story on organized crime in Louisiana.