

Bill Passes on Access to Data

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The Senate yesterday passed, 64 to 17, a bill to strengthen public access to government documents and files under the 1966 Freedom of Information Act.

But two amendments were adopted that turned some supporters of the bill against it.

The bill as reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee was generally similar to a measure passed by the House on March 17, 383 to 8.

However, the committee's ranking Republican, Sen. Roman L. Hruska of Nebraska, said the bill had been so altered that he not only would vote against it but would

strongly urge President Nixon to veto it.

Other committee members who voted against passage were Chairman James O. Eastland (D-Miss.), John L. McClellan (D-Ark.) and Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.).

Overall, through procedural changes in the 1966 law, the bill is intended to make it easier, quicker, and less costly for citizens to obtain access to government information.

Hruska's chief objection was to an amendment by Sen. Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.) that was adopted 51 to 33. He also protested another by Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine), adopted 56 to 29.

Hart's amendment provided specific limitations on an exemption from the disclosure requirements of the 1966 act for investigatory records compiled for law enforcement purposes.

Hruska argued it would gravely endanger the work of the FBI, drying up its confidential sources, and also had "a tremendous potential for invasion of privacy."

Muskie's amendment altered a provision permitting federal judges to examine in chambers documents withheld on national security grounds to determine if they had been properly classified.