CONGRESS REFORM PASSED BY HOUSE IN 326-TO-19 VOTE

Bill Streamlining Procedure Long Bound by Tradition Is Sent to the Senate

By MARJORIE HUNTER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 17—Heeding demands of reformers, the House passed by a 326-to-19 vote today a bill to streamline Congressional procedures.

The bill now goes to the Senate, where leaders have promised to try to push it through before Congress adjourns or recesses for the November elections.

Long bound by traditions, some dating to Colonial times, Congress has rarely considered modernizing its machinery. Virtually no changes have been made in the last 24 years.

While far more modest than would-be reformers had sought, the bill would make major changes in many age-old House procedures.

It would curb the use of non-record votes on amendments, permit radio and television broadcasting of House committee sessions, require committees to make public votes taken in closed sessions, permit use of electronic voting on the House floor and provide a method by which a committee majority can force a meeting over objections of a chairman.

Barriers Are Provided

The bill would also require that the House outfit its public galleries with soundproof, transparent barriers. And it would establish a residential school to be named for the retiring peaker, John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, for teen-age Congressional pages.

The wide margin by which the bill cleared the House gave little hint of its bumpy legislative journey, dating back several years.

The Senate passed a broader reform bill a few years ago, but it was promptly bottled up in a House committee.

Finally, this summer, after more than a year of delicate negotiations, a House Rules subcommittee, headed by Representative B. F. Sisk, Democrat of California, produced a 140-page reform bill.

When floor debate opened in early July, there were indications that the bill might be in real trouble and might never clear the House.

While framers of the bill succeeded in keeping intact most of their proposals, they lost two major provisions: establishment of a joint committee on data-processing, and replacing the present system of high-school-age pages with

Continued on Page 15, Column 5

The New York Times
Published: September 18, 1970
Copyright © The New York Times

CONGRESS REFORM CLEARED BY HOUSE

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

those of college age.

One major obstacle to passage was removed today when the House voted to delete the section that would have established a joint Senate-House committee to develop a modern computer system dealing with legislation and the Congressional workload.

A House Administration subcommittee has spent two years setting up plans for a House computer system. Protesting that the Senate would try to monopolize the computers, subcommittee leaders threatened to kill the entire reform bill if the joint committee proposal were not shelved.

The House also avoided a showdown with the Senate by scrapping a provision that would have required a two-thirds vote—instead of a simple majority—for adoption of any nongermane Senate amendment to a House bill.

As passed by the House, the bill makes no change in the seniority system, the principal target of would-be reformers. Efforts to change the system—by which members move into positions of power solely through length of service—were soundly defeated in July.

The House also rejected a proposal that would have opened most committee meetings to the public.

In a last-minute reversal, the House rejected today an earlier tentative decision that would have banned the long-time system by which votes of absentees can be cast by proxy in committees.

The change in House voting procedures would apply only to the House since the Senate, operating under different rules, has no similar system for screening votes of members of amendments.

The bulk of the changes in the reform bill involve only the House. The Senate could, if it wished, vote to include changes in its own procedures.

But while primarily a bill geared to modernizing House procedures, Senate action is needed because the measure includes several provisions affecting both houses.

The New York Times
Published: September 18, 1970
Copyright © The New York Times