

Senate to be voted upon as it is, without amendment. It not infrequently happens that the conferees for one body or the other do not support certain of the major provisions of the bill passed by their own chamber. Last year, for example, a conservative coalition in the House succeeded in passing its own modest version of a minimum wage bill, but its leaders elected not to let the measure go to conference. They knew that the conferees to be named by the Speaker would make no more than a token effort to represent the House position, and would bring back a measure more liberal than the one the House had approved. Opening up conference sessions to the press and public certainly is not a complete cure for this kind of problem, but reformers believe that it would help. In their view, conferees would be more careful to represent their chamber's position if they knew their performance was being monitored.

The majority caucuses of the House and Senate, themselves always closed to the public, can in principle instruct the Democrats on the various committees as to the practices to be followed. On 11 January, the Democratic conference or caucus in the Senate adopted a resolution stating that Senate committees "should conduct their proceedings in open session in the absence of overriding reasons to the contrary." The caucus added blandly that, whenever the doors of a committee are closed, an explanation should be forthcoming from the chairman. This resolution is so weak that it could turn out to have scarcely any effect on the behavior of the committee.

The Democratic caucus in the House had been expected to adopt on 1 February an open-meetings resolution stronger and more explicit than the one approved by the Senate caucus, but the House caucus adjourned before taking it up. This resolution, still given an excellent chance of adoption, has been proposed by three members of the liberally oriented Democratic Study Group—Representatives Bob Eckhardt of Texas, Dante Fascell of Florida, and Thomas Foley of Washington. It would require that no meeting of a House committee or subcommittee could be closed except by a roll-call vote of its members, with such a vote required for each day the committee meets in closed session. Also, the resolution would apply specifically to mark up sessions as well as to sessions held for hearing testimony or conducting other business.

However, it would not, and of course could not, apply to House-Senate conferences, which no doubt would continue to be held routinely in private.

Under the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, House committees may decide, by a vote early in a new session of Congress, to close all their mark up sessions for the remainder of the year. Now, to have to take such a vote meeting by meeting and ask newsmen, lobbyists, and other citizens to leave could be embarrassing, particularly if some of the committee members should want the session to remain open. The

House Committee on Education and Labor and the full committee on Interior and Insular Affairs (but not its subcommittees) have, even in past years, generally been conducting their mark up sessions publicly. Some other House committees, possibly quite a few of them, will probably be following the example of Education and Labor and Interior if the proposed caucus resolution is adopted.

To bring about open congressional meetings has been one of the two major reforms (the other being abolition of the seniority system) currently pur-

Sickle Cell Screening of Recruits Urged

All recruits for the armed forces should be screened for sickle cell disease and other hemoglobin disorders, according to a committee of the National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council that has just released the results of a study it made for the Department of Defense (DOD). The screening, the committee believes, should be mandatory.

In what appears to be an effort to escape the flap that would surely ensue if it had recommended mandatory screening for persons who merely carry the trait for one of several identifiable hemoglobin defects, the committee chose to emphasize that such screening should be carried out only to detect persons with overt disease. However, because it is not technically feasible to screen a blood sample for evidence of genetic hemoglobin disease without also picking up trait carriers, the distinction is academic.

According to Robert Murray of Howard University, the chairman of the study group, the DOD is being urged to screen not only for the presence of hemoglobin disorders among recruits, but also for other problems that may go unnoticed in routine military physicals. By using automated screening procedures requiring a single blood sample, he says, one could pick up persons with diabetes, gout, iron-deficiency anemia, kidney impairment, and other pathological conditions.

Addressing another, related issue, the committee advised the DOD to revise its policy of limiting the activities of military men who are known carriers of sickle cell trait, a group Murray estimates to comprise about 8 percent of black inductees. (He estimates that between 1.5 and 2 per thousand black inductees will be found to have previously unrecognized sickle cell disease.)

Noting that available medical data on the question are anything but definitive, Murray said the committee found no reason to believe that sickle cell trait carriers are endangered in any way. In 1970, there was a report in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that recounted the fate of four black trait carriers who died (in separate events) during combat training at high altitude. The committee found that the link between these individuals' sudden deaths and their status as sickle cell trait carriers was only circumstantial.

To err on the side of caution, the committee advised the DOD to retain its restrictions against trait carriers' serving as pilots or deep-sea divers, and in other critical positions in which there might be a slight chance of a person getting into physiological trouble because of low oxygen. In all other regards, it believes the military should treat trait carriers like everybody else.

So far, the committee has received no response—other than a pro forma thank you—from the DOD to its report, which was submitted last 21 December. The NAS has no idea how much its proposal would cost.

—B.J.C.