

Study in Absenteeism: One Senate Committee's

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 29—The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held an organizational meeting this week, but only 4 of the 15 members showed up and most of them did not stay for long.

The purpose of the meeting on Wednesday was to lay out the committee's plan and strategy for the coming Congressional session. The committee wound up approving a \$375,000 budget for itself—the same amount as last year—but after a disjointed discussion put off any decisions on its plans.

On Thursday, the committee held a public hearing on a treaty, now awaiting Senate approval, that would ban nuclear weapons on the seabeds. Two Senators—J. W. Fulbright, the chairman, and Clairborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Island—showed up, and Senator Fulbright left after a while.

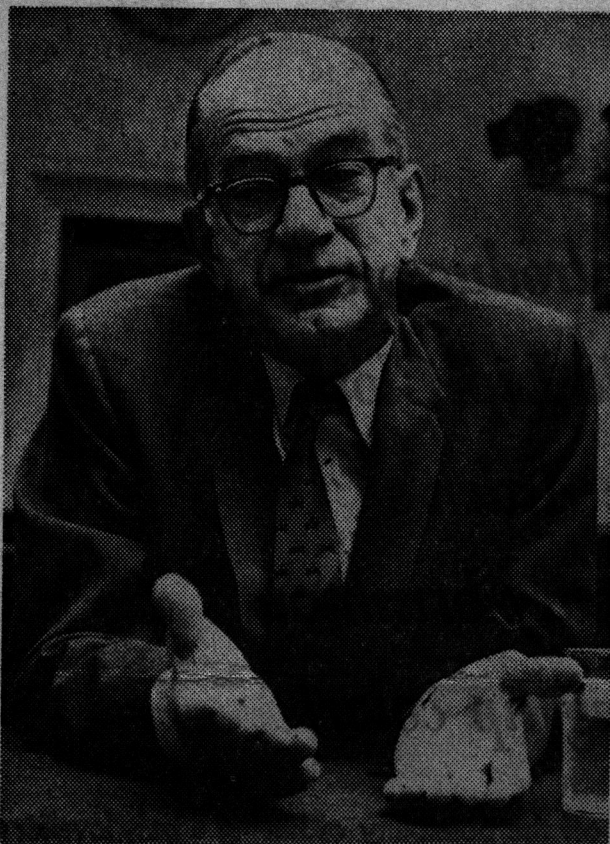
Serve on Many Panels

A somewhat discouraged Senator Fulbright observed later to a reporter: "This is the kind of committee that Senators like to be on, but they don't like to do anything."

Lack of attendance is a common problem in the Senate, where members serve on many committees.

The Foreign Relations Committee in recent years has been trying to establish itself as a counterbalance to the executive branch. But as some of the committee members and aides privately acknowledge, the question inevitably arises of how effectively the committee can do this if it cannot even assemble its members for an organizational meeting.

Absences also raise a problem for the State Department as it tries to fulfill the committee's insistent demand to be



J. W. Fulbright was discouraged by the poor attendance

consulted about foreign policy. Frequently, as in the seabed treaty hearing, officials will go before the committee to present their case and find themselves talking to only two or three Senators.

Occasionally an individual committee member will charge that the department failed to inform the committee of some development. In some cases it has turned out that the department did inform the committee, but that the Senator was not present.

The competition for the Senators' time and interest was illustrated by the organizational meeting.

Senator Fulbright sat in the committee room for 20 minutes before the first Senator—John J. Sparkman of Alabama, who also is chairman of the Banking Committee—appeared. Subsequently, Democratic Senators Gale McGee of Wyoming and William B. Spong Jr. of Virginia came in, but only Mr. Fulbright stayed for the entire session.

No Republican Senators attended. Senator George D. Aiken of Vermont was attending a meeting of the Agriculture Committee.

Javits Gives a Proxy

At one point, Senator Jacob K. Javits, Republican of New York, poked his head through the doors to tell Senator Fulbright: "Vote me Yes if you need my vote."

But Senator Javits was occupied with a job discrimination bill on the Senate floor and emergency strike legislation before the Labor and Public Welfare Committee, of which he is the ranking Republican.

Senator Clifford P. Case, Republican of New Jersey, was at the State Department having

coffee with Secretary of State William P. Rogers. Then he addressed the Machinists Union.

Senator John Sherman Cooper was returning from Kentucky, where he had announced he would retire from politics this year.

Senator James B. Pearson of Kansas, who is up for re-election, was working on a policy statement about air mail service to small communities.

Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania was attending a meeting of Republican legislative leaders at the White House. Senator Karl E. Mundt, Republican of South Dakota, was disabled at home with a stroke he suffered two years ago.

On the Democratic side, Senator Mike Mansfield, the majority leader, tends to remain aloof from the committee and seldom attends a meeting. Senator Frank Church of Idaho was preparing a speech to give

that evening before the Washington Press Club.

Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri was attending a meeting of the Armed Services Committee, which was considering a supplemental request for funds from the Pentagon.

Senator Pell was acting as chairman at a meeting of the Rules Committee because Senator B. Everett Jordan of North Carolina, the chairman, could not be present.

Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine was campaigning for the Presidential nomination in Kentucky.

A discouraged aide to one of the absent Senators, who left the Foreign Service thinking he could be more effective on Capitol Hill, observed: "Until these guys discipline themselves, they are never going to be able to assume the burden of standing up to the State Department."

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