

Senate Vote Saves Church Aging Panel

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WASHINGTON — A jubilant Sen. Frank Church watched the Senate vote 90 to 4 Tuesday to save his Select Committee on Aging, capping a series of victories in his fight against a Senate committee reorganization plan that once threatened to strip him of much of his power.

As the Senate voted for his amendment to restore the Aging Committee, which the reorganization plan would have abolished, the Idaho Democrat said he comes out of the reorganization "stronger than ever before."

The senator spearheading the committee overhaul, Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, had to accept Church's agreement to reduce the number of Aging Committee members from the current 16 to an eventual 9 — "particularly since I already had the votes to beat him anyway," Church said.

The Aging Committee chairman walked onto the Senate floor for debate Tuesday with 51 co-sponsors (a majority) for his amendment, and pledges of support from 15 more. Floor debate dragged on for four hours, however, before the final compromise was reached.

Stevenson feared that letting the Aging Committee stay alive without any changes would open the door to the destruction of the entire reorganization plan, which sought to cut the number of Senate committees

from 33 to 15 and will end with about 24 committees.

Asked how he did it, Church said, "The old folks were for me. They were heard from all parts of the country."

"It's been my chief love," Church said of the chairmanship of the committee that spotlights and reports on problems of the elderly. The panel cannot report legislation, referring proposals to other committees instead. "It's brought me more satisfaction than any other committee," Church said.

In his own words, Church "won on all fronts." He was picked by a Chicago television station late last year as the senior Democrat with the most to lose from the reorganization plan, but he protected all his fiefdoms.

Not only does he keep the Aging Committee, a post that has won him national recognition, but the Foreign Relations Committee he expects to chair in 1979 will not lose some of its powers as he originally feared, and the Interior subcommittee he chairs will not be gutted.

Reorganizers originally proposed to take hydroelectric power and irrigation matters away from Church's water and power resources subcommittee — "the very reason I got on the Interior Committee 20 years ago" — and give it to the Agriculture Committee. That proposal was also defeated.