

House panel rejects bills to bar Nazi march

By Bob Sexter

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill.-Legislative efforts to block a planned June 25 Nazi march through heavily Jewish Skokie suffered a serious — but not fatal — blow Tuesday in a House judiciary committee.

Heeding warnings that the measures dangerously encroached on First Amendment constitutional freedoms, the committee resoundingly rejected two bills designed to arm Skokie officials with sufficient legal weapons to stop the Nazi march.

The 16-to-4 and 15-to-5 tallies against the two bills came even though both sailed out of the Senate last month with little opposition.

Despite the action, opponents of the legislation were not happy. Because of parliamentary maneuvering, it is expected to be relatively easy for sponsors of one of the measures to bypass the committee roadblock and bring the bill to the House floor.

“I EXPECT THERE is less rationality among the body as a whole than there is in this committee,” lamented an official of the American Civil Liberties Union, which has led the fight to preserve the Nazi’s right to march.

Backers of the bills vowed not to give up. Rep. Alan J. Greiman (D-Skokie), a sponsor of one of the measures, reminded reporters after the vote that the liberal-minded judiciary committee often has been reversed by the full House on major policy issues.

“This committee doesn’t have a very good track record,” blared Greiman as he stalked out of the committee room, vowing to file a motion to have the full House overturn the committee vote.

A Marquette Park-based neo-Nazi group has tried for more than a year to parade through Skokie, but the march has been delayed by legal wrangling. However, recent court decisions have given the go-ahead to the Nazis, and on May 26 they asked for — and received — a June 25 parade permit from reluctant

Skokie village officials.

Opponents of the march are now viewing the Legislature as their best chance to stop the Nazis. Even if one of the bills should eventually be declared unconstitutional, the opponents believe that its passage would at least force the courts to order the march delayed.

The measure with the best

chance of being revived is the one sponsored by Greiman and Sen. Howard W. Carroll (D-Chicago). It creates a new crime of criminal group defamation and gives local officials the right to seek injunctions to stop derogatory demonstrations and the distribution of hate literature.

The other measure, sponsored by Sen. John J. Nimrod

(R-Glenview), would ban parades by quasi-military hate groups such as the Nazis.

THROUGHOUT THE debate, advocates of the march ban maintained that it was needed to prevent violence in the suburb, many of whose residents are survivors of World War II Nazi death camps.

“Isn’t it better to stop it (the march) before someone gets killed?” argued Carroll as he presented his bill to the House committee.

More persuasive among the committee members, however was the argument that enacting laws to stop the Nazis would chip away at the freedom of speech.