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# Reduce the legislature?—Why one state regrets it

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[for a record total of 5,991 bills filed in 1980].

As for efficiency, the smaller House has stayed in session roughly the same length of time as in the years immediately before the reduction. However, it adjourned this year before it could finish much of the business the state constitution apparently requires it to complete.

"I don't see any way in which the efficiency has improved," said Robert Turner, a Boston Globe columnist who covers state government.

• A 1968 University of Michigan study rated the Massachusetts legislature as the second most innovative in the country, behind New York's. Yet many observers agree that the cut has sapped its creativity and transformed it into a duller institution.

"The more voices you have, the more ideas result," said George Keverian, majority leader of the predominantly Democratic House.

"The House today is less innovative, less creative, and more boring. . . . There are fewer viewpoints, and so the quality of meaningful debate has been much less," he added.

Contributing to the House's doldrums has been the loss of some of the "best and brightest" legislators, who were sacrificed when the House was pared.

• With the House membership reduced, more power has been concentrated in the Democratic leadership, giving it unprecedented control over legislation without effective dissent. Also, some representatives maintain that lobbyists have gained new influence because there are fewer House members to deal with.

• The number of blacks and women members decreased at only a slightly greater rate than the one-third cut in the House size. But many of those still in the House claim their influence has been significantly watered down.

"We need numbers for legitimacy, and in pure numbers we're not there anymore," said Sandra Graham, a black representative from Cambridge.

• Quite a few of the legislators who lost their elected posts have been hired as well-paid bureaucrats in state patronage jobs. Republicans claim the number of those hired is about 30, while Democrats say the actual count is less.

• Although accountability is difficult to measure, critics claim there is some evidence that House members are not more accountable since the shrinking. They point out that members of the

## House cutback gains backers

TWENTY-SEVEN senior citizen leaders from across the state have endorsed the proposed amendment to reduce the size of the Illinois House by one-third, according to the Coalition for Political Honesty, chief supporters of the proposal.

Kenneth Grubbs, of the American Association of Retired People, said the cutback amendment is "a responsible way for seniors and all taxpayers to eliminate political waste in Springfield without affecting services to any citizen." Grubbs is a coordinator of a committee urging elderly persons to vote for the amendment Nov. 4.

The cutback amendment is a binding referendum to reduce the size of the House from 177 to 118 members and to require each representative to run in a competitive one-on-one contest.

smaller House have reduced the frequency of roll call voting, which lets constituents know where each legislator stands on issues.

"In short," summed up Rep. James Collins, a Democrat who originally supported the cutback, "the House today is less populist, less grassroots, less democratic, and has less diversity."

Collins has come to believe that "in this day of cynicism about government, we ought to increase the size of the House to get in more varying viewpoints."

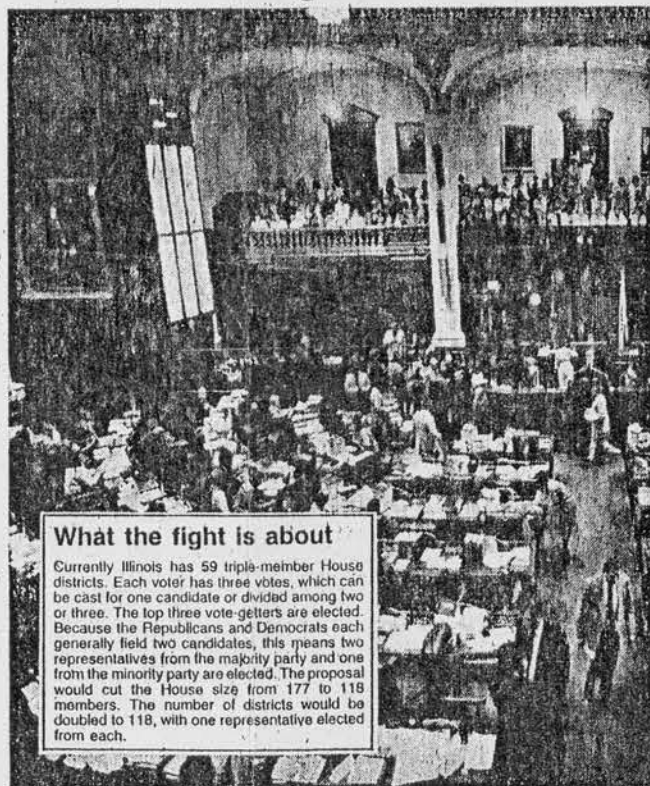
Added Turner, "I haven't heard anyone going around [since the cutback] saying, 'Gee, isn't this terrific?'"

HOWEVER, THE League of Women Voters, which worked seven years to get the cutback proposal on the Massachusetts ballot, has not abandoned the concept.

Patricia Facey, the league's state government specialist, believes it's too early to assess the cutback's effects. She said the House cut has been unfairly blamed for some negative developments that actually were caused by other changes.

Mrs. Facey added that the cutback has been beneficial by giving legislators better access to office space and telephones and making more debating time

## The Illinois legislative cut-back referendum



### What the fight is about

Currently Illinois has 59 triple-member House districts. Each voter has three votes, which can be cast for one candidate or divided among two or three. The top three vote-getters are elected. Because the Republicans and Democrats each generally field two candidates, this means two representatives from the majority party and one from the minority party are elected. The proposal would cut the House size from 177 to 118 members. The number of districts would be doubled to 118, with one representative elected from each.

### 'For' the creation of single-member districts

#### Cost

A smaller House would save taxpayers about \$7 million a year in salaries, expenses, and staff costs.

#### Efficiency

The House would become more streamlined; the Illinois House is far bigger than the maximum of 100 members recommended by the National Municipal League for effective performance.

#### Competition

One-on-one contests in single-member House districts would make representatives more accountable and reduce confusion.

#### Representation

The proposal would result in smaller districts with 95,000 residents in each, compared with current larger districts with 190,000 each.

#### Bills

The number of bills filed would be reduced.

#### Majority rule

The current system of guaranteeing minority parties representation in each district violates the principle of majority rule; in some districts, third-place candidates have been elected with only a small percentage of the vote.

### 'Against' creation of single-member districts

The \$7 million estimate is excessive; besides, this is only a tiny fraction of the state budget.

Democracy, by its nature, is not intended to be streamlined. Also, a smaller House would concentrate too much power in the hands of the leadership.

Some of the legislature's best-qualified members would lose their seats, thus diminishing diversity and making the House less representative of differing viewpoints.

Currently there is one House seat for about every 63,000 residents; under the cut, there would be one seat for every 95,000 residents.

Cutting House size would not necessarily reduce the number of bills and would inhibit innovative legislation by reducing the number of new ideas.

The current system helps make sure that minority parties in each area have an opportunity to provide input into legislation. Doing away with the system would encourage confrontations between city and suburban areas.

Tribune Graphic

available.

She conceded, however, that "some good legislators" were lost and that for the rest of the House, "I don't know that the quality has improved any."

Former Gov. Michael Dukakis also remains a supporter of a reduced House, yet he added, "I would caution against assuming that a cut in size will necessarily improve a legislature's performance."

ALTHOUGH THEY are similar, there are some differences between the Illinois and Massachusetts House cuts. For

instance, the size of Massachusetts districts grew when its House was reduced, leading to complaints that legislators have too much territory to cover. But in Illinois, the geographical size of districts will actually decrease under the proposal on the ballot.

Patrick Quinn, who heads the drive to reduce the Illinois House, believes that shortcomings of the Massachusetts cutback will not happen in Illinois because of differences between the states. His opponents disagree and often cite the Bay State as an example of how the

supposed reform can go awry.

No state has Illinois' system of triple-member House districts in which a voter can cast three ballots for one candidate or distribute his votes among two or three. Generally, the system allows the dominant party in an area to elect two representatives and the minority party one, even though the third-place winner may receive only a small percentage of the votes.

Until 1974, however, Massachusetts had a system that was similar in several respects. The decision to abandon this

in favor of single-member districts has proved popular, even among those adamantly opposed to shrinking the House.

"Single-member districts are a better approach because you've got healthy one-on-one competition," said Switzer, who once served in a triple-member district.

"The single-member system eliminates confusion and makes one representative the focal point, which helps improve accountability," Keverian added.



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