

Foulup in the House

The case of the missing solon

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Where, oh where, did P.J. Gallagher go?

For more than a half hour early yesterday morning, no one in the State House of Representatives knew.

But, the mysterious absence of the Tacoma Democrat, plus an entanglement caused by House rules, kept the lower chamber idle and postponed adjournment until nearly 2:30 a.m.

The foulup occurred after the House had been in session off and on for more than 15 hours, stalling while the two chambers attempted to work out conflicts on the tax revision-income tax legislation.

A few minutes after 1 a.m. House Republican leaders trotted out their version of a legislative redistricting plan and vainly attempted to pass it over strenuous Democratic objections.

When that proposal failed the Republicans unveiled another and tried to add it as an amendment to another bill.

All this time the House was under a "call." This



means that all doors are locked and all members are required to be present unless excused by the body.

They are also required to vote on any question coming before them.

WHEN HOUSE Speaker Thomas Swayze, Jr., called for a vote on the amendment Representative Robert Charette, Aberdeen Democrat, declared:

"I'm not going to vote. I haven't even seen a map of how my district would be."

For about fifteen minutes Republican leaders huddled on the rostrum, poring over rules governing the lower chamber.

Finally, Swayze read the rule requiring all members to vote and another saying that recalcitrant members could be censured or expelled.

But, no one wanted to try anything like that.

Only after Representative Bledsoe came up with a map of Charette's district did the Aberdeen lawmaker return to his seat and vote no.

Then, Swayze discovered that not only had Gallagher not voted but he was also missing.

"Sergeant-at-arms, bring in Mr. Gallagher," the Speaker ordered.

Sergeant-at-arms Gene Prince and his assistants fanned out through the chambers, halls, rotunda, and other areas of the big Legislative Building but Gallagher was not to be found.

Minutes went by while the big tote board on the wall behind the rostrum kept flashing the status of the balloting.

Again, Republican leaders huddled, trying to

find a way out of this new dilemma.

Under House rules nothing can interrupt a roll call once it is begun. So, the speaker could not even recognize a motion to excuse Gallagher.

It began to look as if the members would be stalled throughout the remainder of the night.

MEANWHILE, the electronic equipment, built into the speaker's desk, which operates the voting equipment became hotter and hotter. As time went by, the indicator panel in front of the speaker became almost too hot to touch. The odor of burning insulation filled the air.

Finally, at 2:20 a.m. the sergeant-at-arms brought in Gallagher, who walked to his seat and cast his vote against the amendment.

With no further delay Swayze sent the bill to the Rules Committee and adjourned the House for the night.

Wherewas Gallagher? "There are some questions we don't ask," Bledsoe said.

But a check indicated the Tacoma legislator had sneaked down a stairway in the House cafeteria, through the kitchen and out a back door.

Gallagher went to a downtown hotel. He returned when he learned his absence was threatening to burn up the vote-tallying mechanism.

What had he left the House chamber?

Partly to stall action on the Republican-sponsored redistricting plan, Gallagher said later.

But, he confirmed that another element was a \$20 bet he made earlier that he could sneak out of the House chambers anytime he wanted while it was under call.

Things may not be as easy for Gallagher in the future.

Republican leaders discovered he had a key to the cafeteria door. They took it away from him.