

Federal shield law stalls in Senate

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WASHINGTON — A federal bill initiated by Indiana GOP Sen. Richard Lugar and Rep. Mike Pence to give reporters limited protection from having to reveal their sources was set aside by lawmakers Wednesday.

A Senate vote to consider the bill failed amid a Republican push to debate new energy legislation. The shield law would prevent federal judges from compelling reporters to name confidential sources, with excep-

tions for public interests like national security.

Supporters argue that a shield law would encourage whistleblowers if their identities are protected and strengthen muckraking journalism. The Watergate scandal, the Enron collapse and neglect at Walter Reed Army Medical Center all came to light in news stories quoting anonymous insiders.

"This legislation confirms America's Constitutional commitment to press freedom and advances our foreign policy ini-



Sen. Richard Lugar initiated a bill in the Senate to protect reporters from having to reveal sources.

tiatives to promote and protect democracy," Lugar said of the latest version of the bill. "We must lead by example and the role of the media as a conduit between government and the citizens it serves cannot be devalued."

Lugar's staff says he will con-

tinue to push for the bill, but it is unlikely to see action before the August recess. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., has reserved the option of reviving the bill in September. Otherwise, federal shield law legislation must wait for the next Congress and the next president.

Both parties' presumptive presidential candidates, Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain, support a federal reporter shield law. Obama is a co-sponsor of the Senate bill along with Lugar.

President Bush has threatened a veto. Administration officials argue that the bill would make safeguarding classified information more difficult.

Some form of protection exists in 49 states, including Indiana, and the District of Columbia.

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