

Why Helms is getting off easy

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government says national security and concern for a "distinguished career" were factors in allowing former CIA Director Richard M. Helms to plead no contest to charges of failing to testify fully about CIA activities in Chile.

The Justice Dept., with President Carter's concurrence, cited Helms' "outstanding services" yesterday in asking a federal judge to impose the minimum \$200 fine and suspend any jail sentence on two misdemeanor charges.

Helms, 64, entered the plea to charges stemming from 1973 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which was holding hearings on his nomination to be U.S. ambassador to Iran.

The nomination by then-President Nixon was subsequently confirmed by the Senate.

PLEA PROTESTED

Assistant Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti said he expected Helms to be sentenced soon, perhaps as early as today.

The plea bargaining arrangement drew an immediate protest from Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), who presided over a Senate subcommittee investigation into clandestine U.S. involvement in Chilean domestic politics.

The government said, however, it agreed to the no-contest plea because "trial of this case would involve tremendous costs to the U. S. and might jeopardize national secrets."