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12 Former Presidents of NSA Assert CIA Did Not Impair Their Freedom

Associated Press

Twelve former presidents of the National Student Association said yesterday that the subsidy the organization received secretly from the CIA did not impair its independence in matters of principle.

The 12 said in a joint statement that each of them was fully informed, after being elected to office, that the CIA was supplying funds for NSA's overseas programs.

The statement appeared over the names of the men who headed NSA in 1952 and the years 1954-64.

After outlining the purposes and scope of the Association's overseas activities, the 12 men said:

"Without substantial funds, NSA's international program would have been immobilized. Yet each of us concluded that, without question, we would have chosen immobilization if the only funds available were conditioned on impairment of the independence of any of NSA's principles or programs.

"And so the question became whether CIA funds entailed any such conditions. We state categorically that they did not.

"Each of us after being elected to office was fully

informed about the CIA relationship. Allegations that we were 'trapped' or 'duped' are arrant nonsense.

"While we constantly searched for alternative sources of funds, this relationship was the only realistic and responsible alternative available to us at that time. Each of us authorized its continuation subject to the controls and safeguards which we deemed necessary to insure the complete independence and integrity of NSA.

"One such safeguard was to insist that senior elected officers in succeeding years be informed of the relationship so that no possibility could exist of bypassing the duly elected leadership of the Association, which would reappraise the relationship annually.

"Each of us maintained the utmost vigilance and independence of judgment during his term of office. Attempts at control would not have been tolerated. Any such attempts would have resulted in immediate termination of the relationship."

The tone of the statement was in sharp contrast to some of the statements about the CIA subsidy made by current officers.

Samuel Brown, chairman of NSA's 10-member supervisory board, told a news conference a week ago that some members of the NSA were trapped into signing security oaths without knowing why. He said this was true of students he said were recruited by the CIA to spy for it.

A three-man study panel named by President Johnson said in a preliminary report this week that there was nothing improper about the subsidy arrangement. The White House said Mr. Johnson agrees with this assessment.