

5-1 8/4/67

Proposal to Limit Crime Reporting Is Criticized

By BARRY SCHWEID

HONOLULU (AP)—News media representatives opened fire today on an American Bar Association study group's recommendation that would limit reporting of crime news.

"The classic function of the press is to find out everything it can about government, about law enforcement," said J. Edward Murray of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

"That's what the free flow of news means, what the reporter can find out, not what the public servant wants to give him on a platter."

MURRAY, MANAGING editor of the Arizona Republic, is chairman of the society's Freedom of Information and Press-Bar Committee.

He spoke out against the proposals in remarks prepared for a day-long hearing sponsored by the ABA's section on judicial administration.

"To begin, you will poison the stream of crime and police news by deliberately managing that news at its source," Murray said.

"We won't even let the President manage the news of his own political image without a hue and cry of press criticism.

"HOW CAN WE think of giving the right to manage crime news to every town constable and marshal?"

The ABA recommendations are the result of a 20-month study by 10 prominent judges and lawyers on the constitutional guarantees of free press and fair trial.

Unveiled last October by the panel headed by Justice Paul C. Reardon of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, they stirred immediate con-

troversy within the law and journalism professions.

In the main, the Reardon report calls on lawyers and police to restrict their comments on pending criminal cases and to cut back on the release of information about them. The stated objective is to help assure fair trials for criminal defendants.

HOWEVER, MURRAY told the ABA group: "We of the media contend that, if you adopt the Reardon sanctions, you will cripple the press as a watchdog of law enforcement, as the traditional enemy of secret arrest and the traditional friend of fair trial."

The press, he said, "has often aided justice, sometimes through independent investigation paralleling that of the police, sometimes by discovering that the wrong defendant is in custody, or that a defendant is being mistreated, sometimes by finding political chicanery in the prosecutor's office, sometimes by turning up overlooked witnesses."

"Press freedom is precious," Murray said, "and, except in time of war or great national emergency, it is an indivisible, all-or-nothing freedom.

"The first hint of censorship poisons it. And, as the dictatorship illustrate, censorship itself is a contagious thing. A little breeds a lot."