

Senators seek FBI files

Request called unprecedented in breadth

AA- 5/22/76-P3-D-3 New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Senate Select Committee investigating federal intelligence activities has sent the Justice Department a request for intelligence files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and documents that department officials say is unprecedented in scope.

"They're asking for everything," one official said, "the best thing to do is just to invite them into the front office and say, 'Here's the file room.'"

A 20-page letter embodying the committee's sweeping request for classified materials was sent to Attorney General Edward H. Levi last Thursday, after formal approval of the letter by the 11-member committee a day earlier.

Levi then passed a copy to officials of the FBI, who began to study the demands.

The largest segment of the letter, the Justice Department official said, calls for the production of copies of reports, letters, internal memorandums and routine slips and myriad other documents relating to the agency's intelligence-gathering and counter-intelligence operations.

In addition, he said, the letter contains requests for the bureau's documentation of a number of topics and incidents, such as the drafting of the Nixon administration's plan for increased domestic surveillance, the FBI's wiretapping of Nixon administration

officials and reporters and its electronic surveillance of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"A lot of this stuff is raw files," the official said. He added that the bureau would have to review the committee letter line by line before sending to the attorney general its recommendations for a response.

Levi has previously refused to make the bureau's classified intelligence files available, even on a sample basis, to congressional investigators. The Senate committee's formal request, it is felt, may signal the beginning of a major confrontation between Congress and the executive branch on the issue of access.

The issue with which Levi is concerned is the extent to which the privacy of individuals named in such intelligence files, which often contain unevaluated material and hearsay, should be protected by the Justice Department.

The dilemma he now faces concerns the extent to which the department should make such documents available to aid a congressional committee that is investigating possible abuses of individual privacy by federal intelligence agencies.

Levi recently has declined to make bureau intelligence files available to investigators for a House subcommittee that is conducting a barrower inquiry into the FBI's operations.