

# Invasion of Privacy Focus of Senate Hearing

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The Special Senate Subcommittee on Privacy and Information Systems is nominally holding hearings this week on a bill to establish a privacy and disclosure of information board to oversee "gathering and disclosure of information concerning individuals."

Despite widely divergent ideologies, however, the witnesses are testifying to just one thing—fear of a government with excessive access to sensitive information on individuals.

Vice President Gerald R. Ford, in a letter to committee Chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), yesterday, supported a prohibition on "secret" government record-keeping systems.

"Privacy is a bipartisan cause," Ford said. "We can and should close ranks on this vital issue of growing and legitimate concern to the American people." Ford's remarks were read to the committee by

Phillip W. Buchen, the executive director of the Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy, which Ford heads.

Ford also revealed that the administration is planning to draft legislation to prevent "snooping" by the operators of cable television systems, all of whom have the technical capability to record the program preferences of subscribers without their permission or knowledge.

Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) told the committee it must "program the programmers . . . It is my belief that as we move closer to a data-banked society, privacy must be planned beforehand."

In other testimony, representatives of the National Committee for Citizens in Education, charged that "dossiers" are maintained on at least 45 million public school children. Stanley J. Salt, senior committee associate, claimed 24 states have no statutes protecting the privacy of academic, medical and psychological reports on school children. Eleven states do not main-

tain guidelines for the distribution of information, Salt said, leaving release of such information to the discretion of more than 18,000 local school boards.

Also testifying, yesterday were Hope Eastman, assistant director of the District of Columbia American Civil Liberties Union and representatives of the Liberty Lobby and the Commerce Department's Census Bureau and Institute for Computer Sciences.

The ideological diversity of the witnesses was striking. On Monday, conservative Rep. Barry Goldwater, Jr. (R-Cal.) and liberal Rep. Edward Koch (D-N.Y.) appeared before the committee as cosponsors of a similar bill under consideration in the House. Former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson testified, and each senator present spoke in favor of the bill—all in apparent harmony.

Their reason was a catch-all—"Watergate." For the witnesses, "Watergate" meant the need to regulate vast networks of data banks and a heightened concern about sophisticated interferences in personal privacy. All recognized that technology could aid information-retrieval techniques, sometimes excessively, if not controlled.

The problem the committee faces, Ford said, is "balancing" individual interests and the needs of government in "obtaining the information needed to administer its services and enforce its laws."