

4 FBI informers in news media, Webster says

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI has "about four informants who are connected with the news media in various ways," FBI Director William H. Webster told a Senate subcommittee Tuesday.

Webster made the statement in testimony supporting a proposed congressional charter for the FBI. He urged that the charter not be so detailed as to restrict the government's response to violations of the law.

Webster also testified that Congress should decide whether the FBI should continue to collect information about planned demonstrations at federal facilities or to make background checks on prospective government employees.

ATTORNEY GENERAL Griffin B. Bell, joining Webster at the hearing, said he hoped the proposed charter



William H. Webster

would be a means by which "the American people would tell us what they want us to do."

"It would be a pity just to get Congress to write out a code of laws saying we can't do this and that," Bell testified. He and Webster argued that the code should spell out the FBI's powers affirmatively so agents would know what they could legally do.

Sen. James Abourezk, D-S.D., chairman of the Senate Judiciary's subcommittee on administrative practice and procedure, said enactment of a charter is "still a ways off, but today's hearings move us into the drafting stage."

Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the ranking Republican on the subcommittee, said he "may agree that a legislative charter for the FBI is desirable" but argued that it should not "unnecessarily restrict the bureau from investigating crimes and protecting the security of our nation."

THE QUESTION of informants in the news media came up when Abourezk asked Webster whether the charter should restrict the use as informants of journalists, doctors, clergymen and others whose professions make them privy to confidential information.

Webster said there was no "clear agreement" on this within the FBI, which he said is preparing its own charter proposal and expects to turn it over to Bell and to Abourezk in a week or two.

Webster did not indicate what connection the informants he mentioned had with the news media. He said, "We have been careful not to use them in any way connected with editorial policy."

Pressed by Abourezk, Webster said he would prefer that the charter "not say flat out that you can't use clergymen or newspapermen" or members of other professions. Bell also said he "wouldn't want a blanket prohibition."