

Black Caucus Asks Meeting

By Austin Scott

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The Congressional Black Caucus yesterday asked for a meeting with all members of President Nixon's cabinet to "discuss their responsibility" for what was described in four days of hearings as "rampant lawlessness within the government."

Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.), chairman of the hearings, said each of the dozens of government agencies mentioned will also be asked to explain formally the accusations made against them and to take corrective action "within 90 days."

The caucus is "considering initiating lawsuits in those instances for which we determine there is no other recourse," Dellums said.

"Nobody ever said democracy is easy," he told witnesses on the final day yesterday. "It is totally impossible when the overwhelming mass

of American people do not have the information to make sophisticated decisions."

Organized by Dellums' staff, the hearings loosed what seemed to be an unending torrent of complaints that government agencies sabotage the rights of the poor and minorities, with no recourse available for those who get hurt.

The complaints touched virtually every agency of the federal government and its local operating arms, from justice to food stamps to education.

And throughout there seemed to be a feeling that although some problems stem from malicious employees, even more are caused by officials who find it expedient to serve business interests and higher government officials, rather than people with no power.

Testimony varied widely. There were many charges of outright dereliction of duty similar to the documented one

that the Agriculture Department refused to spend at least \$500 million authorized by Congress to feed the hungry, even though malnutrition is still widespread in some areas.

Others were more subtle, like the accusations of Dr. Sidney Wolfe of Washington's Health Research Group.

Wolfe said the asbestos industry forced the Labor Department to back away from a recommended warning label stating: "Danger, contains asbestos fibers . . . May cause asbestosis and cancer."

"In other words, industry had convinced the Department of Labor they don't want to let any more workers know they're being exposed to cancer," Wolfe said.

Still other charges took the form of a complaint from Frank Jones, former director of OEO Legal Services, that political beliefs were now one of the eligibility tests for a job at the Office of Economic Opportunity.

"Each staff attorney had to not only be cleared through the local Republican chairman in his home town or district or state, but also through a special White House clearance procedure," Jones said.

"Time and time again, when we found the best qualified people for staff positions, they were refused clearance not only if they were Democrat or independent, but even if they were nonpolitical. It was abso-

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lutely essential to be a registered Republican."

At the beginning of yesterday's concluding session, Dellums painted a composite portrait of "the average person who is affected daily by these unlawful actions."

He would be a 28-year-old black man, married with two children, living in a major city and working at a low-level government job, Dellums said.

"He's being evicted from his home—for which he wasn't able to get an FHA mortgage—by 'Project Rehab,' which was set up to build houses in the inner city.

"His neighborhood is being split by a new freeway which displaced 10,000 families' . . . His kids go to a school which

was resegregated by a Justice Department ruling."

The school has a newly redecorated principal's office hallways, Dellums said, both paid for by Title I funds which are supposed to go only to further the education of disadvantaged children.

"His mother died within the last year after she came down sick, but could not get into the charity hospital and the newer, federally funded hospital never had room," Dellums continued.

"His 20-year-old brother has been in three different manpower training courses and still doesn't have a job.

"His cousin who lost his job some months ago has been forced to take a janitorial job

paying under the minimum wage and in doing so lost his welfare benefits . . .

"He . . . has been a government clerk for six years, and has had but one major promotion. He's had a complaint about his supervisor filed for seven months without any action at all being taken by his agency or by the Civil Service Commission . . .

"Despite all this he's still not what might be termed a militant revolutionary. However, he's against the war, and wrote a letter to the local paper saying so. Now his name is on an FBI master list of black troublemakers.

"And while his car has been vandalized twice because there's no adequate street

lighting on his block, at night he can look up and see the patrolling police helicopters with super TV cameras purchased under Law Enforcement Assistance Administration funds."

Rep. Parren Mitchell (D-Md.) said the thousands of examples in oral and written testimony "have been overwhelmingly conclusive in their indictment of federal officials for failing to carry out their congressionally mandated responsibilities."

"We heard during these four days how department after department simply refused to obey the law," he said, and the costs—"those which can be estimated"—he found "staggering."