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White House Defends Probe of TV Newsmen

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The White House said yesterday the FBI investigation ordered on CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr was not intended to intimidate the newsmen, who has often clashed with the administration over the fairness and accuracy of his reports.

Presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said Schorr was being considered for a position in the administration, which he described vaguely as in the "environmental area."

This is why, Ziegler said, White House talent scout Frederic V. Malek or one of his subordinates ordered an FBI investigation into Schorr's background last August.

Ziegler stressed that during the three years of the Nixon administration there has not been a single example of government intimidation of a newsmen.

On the House floor, however, Rep. James H. Scheuer (D-N.Y.) called for a congressional investigation of what he called the "administration's attempt to control the news." Sen. John Tunney (D-Calif.) made a similar plea for an investigation, alleging that Schorr appeared to be the victim of "harassment and intimidation."

Chairman Emmanuel Celler (D-N.Y.) of the House Judiciary Committee was reported to have asked Attorney General John N. Mitchell for an explanation of the FBI investigation.

Ziegler's extended defense of the propriety of investigating Schorr before he was notified he was a candidate for a government post, appeared to Warden Schorr's conviction that he was the victim of "something."

"I remain more convinced than ever that there never was a job" for which he was being considered, Schorr said.

But he said CBS policy prevented him from discussing the issue on television. He added that he was not going to allow himself "to be pushed into a crusade to make it possible for the administration to establish the bias they already accuse me of anyway."

Although Ziegler said the FBI probe came through Malek's office, he refused to disclose the number of White House aides who have the authority to ask for an FBI investigation on individuals.

He did say that neither he nor Charles Colson, special counsel to the President who has complained to CBS about some of Schorr's reports, has the authority to request such a probe.