

'Helms Could Have Won'

Nashville

Attorney General Griffin Bell said yesterday former CIA Director Richard Helms, who was sentenced earlier in the day for testifying untruthfully to Congress, "could have won his case" had it gone to trial.

Helms received a suspended two-year prison term and a \$2000 fine in a U.S. District Court in Washington. He pleaded no contest under a plea-bargaining agreement to two misdemeanor charges of failing to testify truthfully to Congress.

"I think Helms acted with honor," Bell said, "in that he wanted to get the case finished. It was just."

Bell, in Nashville to address the Vanderbilt Law School, appeared to become irritated when he was repeatedly asked about the Helms' case.

"This is not a precedent for anything," he said. "A plea bargain is a plea bargain for one case. We obviously needed to bargain in this case or we wouldn't have bargained. Mr. Helms could have won his case."

Bell declined to expand on his remarks, saying he spent two days early in the week explaining the Justice Department's stand to reporters.

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