

see 3 Jul 67

Nader Charges Many U.S. Aides Violate Free Information Law

WASHINGTON, Aug. 26 (AP)—Ralph Nader and his 100 "raiders," completing a summer-long survey of Federal agencies, charged today that Government officials at all levels were cynically dodging the two-year-old Freedom of Information Act.

"The Freedom of Information Act, designed to provide citizens with tools of disclosure, has been regressively forged into a shield against citizen access," they said.

Mr. Nader, advocate for consumer interests, gathered the students for an in-depth, summer-long study of Federal agencies dealing in problems of critical interest to society.

Before packing up to return to school and private lives this week, the six project directors of the program called a news conference where, with Mr. Nader, they handed down the most comprehensive and critical evaluation of the information law since it took effect July 4, 1967.

The law was designed to improve accessibility by the press and public to Government records and information, with certain exemptions. It provides for court suits to force the disclosure of information.

'A Disturbing Conclusion'

"After three months of exploring the frontiers of the freedom-of-information policy of several Federal agencies," the group said in its 20-page report, "we have reached a disturbing conclusion: That Government officials at all levels in many of these agencies have violated systematically and routinely both the purposes and the specific provisions of the law.

"These violations have come so regularly and with such cynicism that they seriously block citizen understanding and participation in Government.

"There is prevailing an offi-

cial belief that these Federal agencies will not stand for searching inquiries, or even routine inquiries that appear searching because of their rarity, from citizens."

Each agency, the report said, "has created its unique 'common law' in interpreting the act and in developing a maze of confusing regulations."

"There is little doubt that if Government officials display as much imagination and initiative in administering their programs as they do in denying information about them, many national problems now in the grip of bureaucratic blight might become vulnerable to resolution," the report added.

The Nader group emphasized that none of the agencies studied was in the sensitive category dealing with military or foreign affairs.

"They are entrusted with the most sympathetic missions in the governmental arena — health, safety, food purity and distribution and transportation," the group said. "Yet even under daily approach and reasoned requests, these agencies refused to provide information . . . One can imagine the chances of a citizen writing in from Kansas or Oregon."

The press also came under criticism from the Nader group. Only 40 court cases have been brought in two years to force disclosure under the law, Mr. Nader said.

Having sat in on a number of news conferences with Cabinet-level officials, Mr. Nader said, "we went away shaking our heads at the quality of the questioning."

"There seems to be some kind of pressure prevailing which leads reporters not to ask the searing, controversial, difficult questions," he added.

24

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Associated Press

ASSAILS GOVERNMENT SECRECY: Ralph Nader during his Washington news conference yesterday. He charged that Federal officials are evading the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. The act was intended to give citizens greater access to Federal Government records.