

Nixon Opposes News Source Laws

Nixon Opposes News Source

ALBANY, (N.Y.) — (AP) — President Nixon has indicated that he does not favor federal legislation “at this time” to permit newsmen to protect the identity of their sources.

Nixon's views were expressed in a letter to Robert G. Fichenberg, executive editor of the Knickerbocker News - Union Star and chairman of the freedom of information committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

The letter, dated Nov. 4 and received yesterday, was in response to questions sent by Fichenberg to the major presidential candidates.

Sen. George McGovern earlier had replied that he would support such legislation without qualification.

Nixon wrote that he sup-

ports guidelines set by former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell. They require “careful consideration” by a federal prosecutor of each situation involving information sought from a newsmen by a federal grand jury, suggest extensive negotiation with the newsmen and finally, if necessary, a request for a subpoena only after express authorization from the Attorney General.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last summer that the media do not have automat-

ic immunity from revealing confidential sources and information to a grand jury.

Since then 21 newsmen's “shield bills” have been introduced in Congress, but none has passed.

One, drawn up in part by Fichenberg's committee, provides that the information sought from a newsmen must involve a compelling and overriding national interest before the newsmen can be required to testify.

Nixon wrote that Congress should first grapple with the

legal problem of defining a newsmen's qualified privilege and that “the merits of enacting such laws must be carefully weighed against the dangers inherent in the administration and exercise of such a privilege.”

He also suggested that individual states that don't already have “shield laws” or guidelines similar to Mitchell's should enact such laws.