

Individuals' Records

A Bill to Protect Privacy of Files

Washington

A sweeping bill designed to protect individuals' privacy against both governmental and private file-keepers was introduced yesterday by an unlikely partnership of congressmen.

Sponsors are Representatives Barry M. Goldwater Jr., a California Republican with a conservative voting record, and Edward I. Koch, a liberal New York City Democrat.

The bill would require that maintenance of files on individuals be restricted to legitimate public or private business purposes, that the persons involved be advised of the existence of the files, and be given an opportunity to inspect them, correct mistakes and block transfer of the information to third parties.

Exceptions would be allowed in a restricted category of cases, including criminal law enforcement, national security and the maintenance of newspaper and similar libraries.

Enforcement would be in the hands of a five-member Federal Privacy Board named by the President with Senate confirmation.

Use of Social Security numbers for identification in matters not connected with the retirement system would be banned except where specifically provided by law, or when the individual gives permission.

Converting the Social Security number to a universal identifier "enhances the opportunity to abuse the system," Goldwater said. "It is the key that unlocks the computer."

He said his interest in privacy legislation was stimulated when the FBI, demonstrating the efficiency of its filing system, produced for him within minutes a biography if one of his staff.

Koch said the greatest impact of the legislation would be on data banks maintained by credit bureaus and similar organizations.

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