

PANEL TO STUDY RIGHTS OF PRIVACY

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Group to Investigate Public
and Private Abuses

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Should an individual be able to sue the Federal Government for damages for violations of his right to privacy?

Is all the information requested by credit card companies from prospective cardholder really necessary?

Should the use of Social Security numbers for identification be curtailed?

These are some of the questions that David F. Linowes, chairman of the newly established Privacy Protection Study Commission hopes to answer during the next two years. Mr. Linowes and his six fellow members are charged by the Privacy Act of 1974 to examine actual or potential invasion of individual privacy and to recommend legislative or executive action.

Mr. Linowes, a Democrat and a public accountant who has served in a variety of New York state and city and Federal consulting positions, is optimistic about the prospects that his group, unlike so many appointed panels, will be able to do more than simply write a report that is ignored.

By Both Parties

The issue of privacy is one that has united politicians who are otherwise poles apart. One recent privacy bill, numbered H.R. 1984, was co-sponsored by Representatives Barry M. Goldwater Jr., a California Republican, and Edward I. Koch, a liberal Manhattan Democrat. In political terms, privacy is, as Mr. Linowes' said during an interview, "like motherhood. Everybody's giving us complete cooperation."

The act allows the commission to look into invasions of privacy both in government and the private sector—which is essentially unaffected by the act—but Mr. Linowes and the commission members have decided to give first priority to the private sector, precisely because it is not within the scope of existing law.

The Privacy Act restricts access to and transfer of personal information in files or computerized systems maintained by Government agencies, and allows an individual access to, and the right to correct, his own dossier.

The commission is still in its organizing phase, hiring staff and waiting for the General

Services Administration to find office space. But Mr. Linowes and others have talked and thought about areas where they ought to look for possible infringement of personal privacy. Many of the questions they think are worth raising relate to the amount of information collected for various reasons—on personnel records, by unions, by insurance companies and banks—and other uses they may be made of it.