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FBI Halts File-Keeping on Congress

By Sanford J. Ungar
Washington Post Staff Writer

Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III yesterday suspended a bureau program that involved the routine collection of information on members of Congress and congressional candidates.

Gray said the information collection has been going on since 1950 as "a part of the congressional relations program of the FBI," but that it had "just come to my attention."

The information was used, he said, "to provide briefing material for FBI officials who might desire it before making a call on a newly elected congressman or senator."

In recent years, it has also been considered to be of "immediate use in following investigative leads" in connection with possible "violent offenses against members of Congress and members of Congress-elect," the acting FBI director said in a formal statement released last night.

The statement was the first public acknowledgement that the FBI has maintained files of any sort on political figures.

Both Gray and the late J. Edgar Hoover, the original FBI director whom he succeeded last May, had repeatedly denied the charges of congressmen that they were

being wiretapped or otherwise investigated by the bureau.

During several press interviews after he took over the FBI position last spring, Gray insisted that "I have not found any evidence whatsoever of the existence of secret files or political dossiers."

Last night he reiterated that "the FBI is not investigating and has not investigated members of Congress or congressional candidates" and said that the information collection he had uncovered did not fall into the category of "investigations."

"The only exceptions have been where a member was alleged to have violated a fed-

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L. PATRICK GRAY
... stops Ohio agent

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eral law or where the member is being considered for a top-level government appointment," Gray said.

Gray explained that he had learned of the information-gathering program through allegations that an FBI agent in Lorain County, Ohio "had been making inquiries about the background of the Democratic candidate for Congress in Ohio's 13th District," John Ryan.

"This agent's inquiries were not authorized," Gray declared, "and were in violation of specific instructions that the gathering of information on congressional candidates is to be made from readily available sources only, and not through any outside inquiries."

He promised an immediate internal administrative investigation of the agent, Lee Kias, whose inquiry included phone calls to a local newspaper, the Elyria Chronicle-Telegram, asking questions about Ryan.

Before Gray's statement here, the special agent in charge of the Cleveland-area FBI office, John M. Burns, had told reporters that Kias's inquiries were merely those of "an interested voter" who had recently moved into the congressional district. Kias has been assigned to the Lorain County FBI office since last December.

Gray said last night that after giving "consideration to the need for" the collection of information on congressmen and congressional candidates, he had decided it "is not essential to FBI operations."

"It is obvious that it can be misinterpreted easily as a program to investigate congressmen and congressional candidates," he acknowledged.

As described by Gray, the FBI program had included gathering "biographical data on major candidates for the House of Representatives and the Senate from newspapers, magazines, campaign literature, and various reference publications."

He said that "FBI field

offices from time to time have been requested, by means of a routing slip directive, to assist by providing information that was readily available from local files and local publications."

In April, 1971, House Majority Leader Hale Boggs (D-La.) charged that the FBI, using "the tactics of the Soviet Union and Hitler's Gestapo," had routinely tapped the telephones of congressmen.

The White House, Justice Department and FBI vehemently denied that allegation, however, and Boggs never produced the evidence he said was being compiled for him by a "group of very competent lawyers."

It was acknowledged that the FBI used electronic eavesdropping devices in its investigation of alleged illegal activities by Rep. John Dowdy (D-Texas), who was later convicted in federal court on bribery charges.

The Justice Department also confirmed at one point that it had obtained telephone rec-

ords of Boggs and former House Speaker John W. McCormack (D-Mass.) in connection with a probe of a former McCormack aide, Martin Sweig, and his associate, Nathan M. Voloshen.

One congressman who long sparred with the FBI as chairman of the House Subcommittee on Government Information, Rep. John Moss (D-Calif.), informed last night by telephone of Gray's decision to suspend the information collection, said, "I want to commend the director for taking steps to stop what never should have started in the first place."