

Tax Data Safeguards Proposed

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The Ford administration and Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn.) yesterday unveiled rival bills to protect confidential income tax returns from political mischief.

Attempts by the Nixon White House to use the Internal Revenue Service to help friends and punish or gather intelligence on enemies have been cited by House and Senate investigating committees, and most recently by Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski, as grave abuses of presidential power.

Both measures introduced yesterday would limit access to tax returns by executive agencies. However, the Weicker bill, co-sponsored by Rep. Jerry L. Litton (D-Mo.) is substantially more restrictive.

The administration proposal, drafted by the Treasury Department, would require most federal agencies who want tax records for statistical purposes to pay IRS to do the studies for them. However, four agencies, including Social Security and the Census, could continue to get raw tax returns.

The Weicker-Litton bill would compel all agencies not

involved with tax collection or enforcement to get their statistics from IRS.

Under existing law, a President can order IRS to give tax returns to any federal agency, as President Nixon did in 1973 when he gave the Agriculture Department the power to look at farmers' returns. After a congressional outcry, the plan was rescinded.

The other major difference between the two reform proposals involves White House access to tax returns.

The administration has decided to treat that question with an executive order, which will be issued shortly. According to Treasury Secretary William E. Simon, the order will permit White House employees to look at tax returns, but only on written request by the President.

Weicker and Litton, by contrast, want to write into law the limits on White House access. Their bill provides that only the President personally can send for a tax return, and it requires a written justification to Congress.

Still pending is Weicker's amendment to the White House staff authorization bill, barring access to tax returns by White House employees. That rider passed the Senate, but was rejected by House conferees July 31 after administration lobbyists expressed strenuous opposition.

The new administration bill could cause some Senate votes to shift; presumably it is timed to break the deadlock and free the White House authorization bill. But an aide to Weicker termed the administration proposal too weak.

"We're not going to back off the amendment until we have some assurance of something better," he said.