

Early Hill Briefing

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On CIA Supported

Associated Press

Former CIA Director Richard M. Helms said yesterday that any new congressional committee set up to monitor intelligence agencies should be briefed on covert operations before they are undertaken.

Helms, currently under investigation by the Justice Department, also told the Senate Government Operations Committee he never felt himself to be above the law.

But he said that "some of the cases where I got in difficulty" involved conflicting laws. He cited a provision in the 1947 National Security Act charging the director to protect intelligence sources and methods.

One of the accusations being investigated by the Justice Department involves Helms' alleged approval of a 1971 break-in at the offices of a former Central Intelligence Agency employee suspected of a security violation. The other involves possible perjury regarding CIA activity in Chile.

"If there's going to be an oversight committee, I think it ought to be in on the takeoff," Helms told the committee, which is considering legislation that would create a

new panel to monitor the intelligence community.

Helms, now ambassador to Iran, said that members of Congress sometimes did not want to be told about the CIA's covert operations in the past "because it could be embarrassing to them politically" if the operation and their knowledge of it were made public.

Asked by Sen. Abraham A. Ribicoff (D-Conn.), the committee chairman, if he felt that congressional oversight committees have "ducked their responsibilities," Helms said he didn't like the word "ducked" but agreed that they had "failed to assume their responsibilities."