

Media Said to Ignore Freedom of Information Act

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WASHINGTON, March 17— Although reporters and broadcasters were in the forefront of those pushing for the Freedom of Information Act, the media have made little use of it during its first four years of operation, a Congressional report said today.

For the most part, according to statistics, it has been commercial interests that have taken advantage of the law, enacted on July 4, 1967, as a means of opening up to public inspection most records of the Government.

Representative William E. Moorhead, Democrat of Pennsylvania, who is chairman of the House Government Information Subcommittee, released the results of a Library of Congress study as his panel resumed hearings on its review of the law.

In analyzing implementation of the act, the Library of Congress concentrated on formal requests for information made of 29 Federal departments and agencies between July 4, 1967, the day the law took effect, and July 4, 1971.

The identification of requests for data were refused by the agency. The total numbered 1,413. Of that figure, only 90 requests, or 6 per cent of the total, were filed by representatives of the media.

On the other hand, corpora-

tions and private law firms were initially refused information under the act 640 times, representing nearly 46 per cent of the usage.

Mr. Moorhead said he was not surprised that businesses were making most use of the act. "Those who can afford the expensive and time-consuming process of fighting for their right to know will do so," he said, adding that he hoped Congress would provide some help for the average citizen.

"I am surprised, however, that the reporters, editors and broadcasters whose job it is to inform the American people

have made so little use of the Information Act," Mr. Moorhead said. "They were the major supporters of those in Congress who created the law."

Under the law, nine categories of information are exempt from required disclosure. They include such areas as national security data trade secrets and internal Government memorandums. When a citizen disagrees with an agency's contention that a record is exempt he may sue for it in Federal court. The burden is on the Government to prove that it does not have to be made public.