

NIXON DATA ORDER HELD STEP AHEAD

Aides Cite Streamlining of Secrecy Classification

WASHINGTON, May 2 (AP) —President Nixon's new directive on classifying national security material will streamline the system by providing earlier public access to more information while protecting data genuinely requiring secrecy, Administration officials said today.

Mr. Nixon's executive order, effective June 1, is a chance to "get control of the classification flood, to lighten substantially the heavy burden it imposes on us while serving the public's need to know at the same time," said Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William D. Blair Jr.

J. Fred Buzhardt, the Pentagon's general counsel, described the order as a "significant milestone in the efforts of the executive branch to provide a rational balance between the public's right to know about the affairs of government, and the equally compelling need to protect certain information against unauthorized disclosure."

Their comments were in testimony prepared for a House Government Information subcommittee hearing.

A year-long study of the system, Mr. Blair said, showed that operation rules were too complicated, that too much power to classify was given to too many persons and that the sheer volume of information has become so great that it overwhelmed any declassification effort that is not largely automatic.

Furthermore Mr. Blair added, the conditions were contributing to a growing lack of respect for the classification system.

The President's new order, he said, simplifies the declassification system, restricts the power to classify, provides "for the first time a declassification system which is genuinely automatic," and sets a practical framework for monitoring the process.

Mr. Buzhardt said the idea of providing just one category instead of the existing three—top secret, secret and confidential—had been considered but rejected by the order's drafters. With one category, he added, it would have been necessary to greatly expand investigations similar to those now required for a top-secret security clearance.

"Based on the number of security clearances presently outstanding, it is estimated that the one-time dollar impact of such a change would be in the neighborhood of an estimated \$828-million, and the annual costs of background investigations would rise from \$53-million to the vicinity of some \$500-million," he said.