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Press Shield Law Called Dangerous

Washington

The Nixon administration reiterated its opposition to a newsmen's shield law yesterday with a Justice Department official saying it would give the press a dangerous power.

Assistant Attorney General Robert G. Dixon told a Senate subcommittee that sometimes the interests of newsmen in protecting their sources of information "conflict with the equally important public interest in eliciting information in order to get at the truth in judicial and legislative proceedings."

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem-N.C.) chairman of the judiciary subcommittee and author of one of numerous proposed newsmen's shield laws before the House and Senate this year, noted that his own proposed law would hold newsmen accountable for testifying in court for example, on crimes they personally witness. However, it would give them absolute privilege from subpoenas to name sources or disclose information on other matters or crimes they did not actually witness, Ervin said.

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But, Dixon's statement argued, most proposed

unqualified and complete protection for newsmen.

ISSUE

Mellinkoff declared that the central issue in the struggle for shield legislation is "only incidentally to shield the reporter and editor from harassment."

"Its basic purpose," he testified, "is to make possible the flow of information to the citizenry in the belief that only an informed people can make sure that democracy will survive."

Mellinkoff said he personally favored the shield bill introduced by Senator Alan Cranston (Dem-California).

"The entire First Amendment itself is only 45 words long," Mellinkoff said, "and something in that range is required for the new law. Cranston's proposal could meet the need. The privilege in his bill is unqualified and complete. News sources and news information intended for dissemination are protected from any snooping by any government at any time, or any place."

Associated Press