

Snooping Curb Hit By Nixon

WASHINGTON — (UPI) —

The Nixon Administration said today it would vigorously oppose any legislation that would impair or open the door to "unnecessary and injudicial supervision" of the government's information-gathering activities.

But Sen. Charles Mathias (R-Md.) charged in testimony before the Senate Constitutional subcommittee that government computers were "bringing the ammunition for persecution, harassment and idle gossip within the reach of every prosecutor and part-time deputy sheriff in the land."

Assistant Attorney General William H. Rehnquist said the answer to criticism of the gathering and storing of information on Americans may be "self-discipline on the part of the executive branch."

Rehnquist said "consideration" would be given to legislation "carefully drawn to meet demonstrable evils in a reasonable way, without impairing the efficiency" of federal investigative activities.

Rehnquist testified before the subcommittee, which is investigating whether information gathered and stored on individuals violates their constitutional rights.

Rehnquist told the committee the occasional imperfec-

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tions in the information gathering system "should not be permitted to obscure the fundamental necessity and importance of federal information gathering."

Rehnquist told the committee that when the Army's domestic intelligence-gathering functions were closed down and its duties transferred to the Justice Department, no information in the Army's computer data banks was transferred.

The Army's domestic intelligence activities have been sharply criticized in testimony before the committee.

Mathias charged that Attorney General John Mitchell secretly had given the FBI control over an elaborate national criminal justice data bank without regard to standards that had been developed to protect the individual against unjust accusations.

He urged development of legislation to insure that such computerized operations contain built-in safeguards against police state tactics.

Data Bank Forerunner

Mathias said a pioneer 10-state system called Project SEARCH (System for Electronic Analysis and Retrieval of Criminal Histories) had been developed as the forerunner of a national criminal justice data bank.

The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration — LEAA — was put in charge of the system and received a \$1.5 million grant for its operational development December 9.

"On Dec. 10, in an internal directive which was not publicly released, the Attorney

General transferred the prime responsibility for future development of a nationwide system for exchanging criminal histories from LEAA to the FBI," Mathias said.

He said he understood Mitchell's letter mentioned nothing about a "code of ethics" that had been developed by Project SEARCH to protect individual privacy.

The code barred the use of "irrelevant data" and "unverified intelligence tips"; recommended continuous purging of the system to eliminate records of accused first offenders who were found innocent, and prescribed procedures to permit individuals to correct inaccuracies or prejudicial omissions in their arrest records.

Mathias said the individual should have some assurance that a youthful indiscretion will not follow him forever.

A suspended sentence at age 18 for marijuana possession should not "pop up for years to jeopardize his applications for jobs, for credit cards and for home loans," Mathias said.

Among the 64,000 computerized files maintained by the Bureau of Narcotics, he noted, were dossiers on "three boys under 3 years old. Will that item be buried in statistical reports, surfac-

ing only as curiosity? Or will three boys be pursued for life by the tragic fact that they were exposed to narcotics almost before they could talk?"