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A 'Grave Threat' Seen to Privacy

Washington

Senator Sam J. Ervin said yesterday he believes that government snooping into private lives has become "a very grave threat" to the constitutional rights of Americans and it is getting worse daily.

He said the threat "arises out of the fact that when people know or suspect that the government is spying on them and collecting information about them, they refrain from exercising their right to associate with other people for the accomplishment of purposes they believe in and their right to assemble with other people and to petition government for redress of grievances."

Ervin, a Democrat from North Carolina, said in an interview in the current issue of U.S. News and World

Report that "most people are afraid of the federal government."

He said both Republicans and Democrats were at fault.

Ervin, who led an investigation last year into the surveillance by Army intelligence agents on civilians who protested the draft and U.S. actions in Vietnam, said he believed the military had ended its spying, at least as long as his committee — the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights — kept its eye on it.

The senator also expressed concern about the private gathering of information, especially by commercial credit bureaus, saying that much of it is not checked for accuracy and is indiscriminately disclosed.

Reuters