

## 'Safeguards are essential to prevent the abuses of a wired society'

# Privacy bills gain support

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WASHINGTON — Legislation to protect the individual's right to privacy gained support from across the political spectrum at Senate subcommittee hearings held this past week.

In testimony before Sen. Sam Ervin Jr.'s Special Subcommittee on Privacy and Information Systems, Democratic and Republican witnesses urged the passage of privacy legislation. Many pointed an accusing finger at what has become an umbrella term for government abuse, "Watergate."

"Watergate has awakened people to the dangers of a pervasive and intrusive government," former Attorney General Elliot Richardson told the subcommittee, "It is important that safeguards are created to restore trust in the government."

This view was echoed by witness after witness during three days of hearings, including representatives of such diverse groups as the conservative Liberty Lobby and the liberal American Civil Liberties Union.

Conservative Rep. Barry Goldwater, Jr., California, and Democrat - liberal Rep. Edward Koch, New York, appeared before the subcommittee as co - sponsors of one privacy bill. Every senator on the committee spoke in favor of proposed legislation.

Even the White House, which hasn't had the best relationship with Congress of late, expressed support in a statement from Vice President Gerald Ford. Ford is chairman of the newly created Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy.

"The time has come for action. I will do all in my power to get results. Safeguards are essential to prevent the abuses of a 'wired society' and to assure that advanced technology remains the servant of our society's most cherished freedoms," Ford said.

The pending legislation is intended to protect individuals from the abusive information gathering and retrieval practices possible with present computer technology.

The bills before the subcommittee would create a National Privacy Board to regulate data banks and the information that goes into them and act as a grievance board. They would also:

- Restrict the use of the Social Security number as a universal identifier.
- Ensure the right of the individual to examine files and records kept on him.
- Require that the individual be notified of the existence of any file that is kept on him.

One of the pending bills would only affect government data banks. Another of the bills would supervise information systems of both government and private industry.

At the hearing's opening, Ervin released the results of a four - year study on "Federal Data Banks and Constitutional Rights." The study found the federal government maintains at least 1.2 billion records on individuals — often without clear legal authority.

It also uncovered plans for a massive data bank called FEDNET.

Under the auspices of the General Service Administration (GSA), FEDNET would consolidate the data systems of GSA and the Department of Agriculture. The system, as originally planned, would have the capacity eventually to centralize the data processing operations of all federal agencies.

Plans for FEDNET have been modified due to public and congressional outcry that the system would invade privacy.

There presently are no laws to control what data enters a system such as FEDNET and there is no way for an individual to know that files kept on him are valid. Nor is there now a uniform system of security. GSA administrator Arthur Sampson noted that "each agency is responsible for determining the security and privacy of its own systems."

Conceivably, anyone with the proper code and technical knowledge could tap into a data bank.