

U.S. Computer Aide's Firing Is Reversed

Washington

General Services Administration chief Arthur F. Sampson backed down yesterday from his decision to fire a government computer expert who leaked information to Congress about a controversial federal computer network.

John E. Holt, a \$32,000-a-year specialist at the GSA, received a memo from Sampson in mid-afternoon rescinding the dismissal order that was scheduled to take effect at the close of business.

Sampson's action followed a ruling by a GSA job review panel Thursday which reversed the unsatisfactory performance rating cited earlier by Sampson as grounds for the firing.

Holt, a career civil servant, claimed that Sampson had no legitimate grounds to fire him and had asked for official review of the unsatisfactory rating. The GSA review panel, in a 2-to-1 vote ordered the rating changed to satisfactory but it had no power to reinstate him.

Holt's supporters claim he was fired because he interfered with Nixon administration efforts to politicize the civil service and because he gave congressional investigators information about FEDNET. GSA was the principal planner and promoter of FEDNET, a proposed \$200 million computer network that was to have been shared by government agencies.

Largely as a result of information Holt gave Congress about FEDNET, funds for the program were blocked, and GSA abandoned the project in the face of critics' charges that the system could be used to invade the privacy of almost any American.

Sampson claimed Holt was fired for failure to perform his duties and for allegedly making defamatory

remarks about fellow workers.

The 44-year-old research and planning specialist had been cited in years past for outstanding work at GSA and had won a cash award for saving the government an estimated \$3.6 million on one computer project. The unsatisfactory performance ratings were added to his personnel file in recent months.

Holt's supporters said his troubles with superiors be-

gan in 1971, after he complained about Hatch Act violations within the GSA, the government's housekeeping arm. The Hatch Act prohibits its political activity among career civil servants except when they are on their own time and away from any government facility.

Sources close to Holt said one of the first actions against him was taken when he returned from a month-long honeymoon in 1971.

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