

For the Record

The FBI and the Press: An Alliance for Truth

From an address by Clarence M. Kelley, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, before the National Newspaper Association in Hot Springs, Ark.

The news media and law enforcement are kindred professions, allied in a compelling mutual endeavor—to serve the American people by seeking out and revealing the truth.

Our two professions serve the people best when our relationship is complementary rather than conflicting. You have a legitimate need for information about crime and law enforcement activities. We operate more effectively against crime when we are able, through the media, to inform the public about our objectives, our problems and our accomplishments . . .

Now I am aware that in the past the FBI has had something less than a wide open press policy. I intend no criticism of that policy in my remarks today. But times change. And I wish to assure you that as a matter of policy, henceforth, the FBI will respond openly to news media inquiries insofar as we are permitted to do so by mandates of law and ethics . . .

We must recognize that there are bounds to what we can disclose—bounds prescribed by law, judicial procedure and propriety . . .

We will not abridge a person's right to due process of law. We will not capriciously lay waste a person's reputation. We cannot damage an investigation or jeopardize a case to be tried in court. Nor can we compromise confidential relationships vital to our investigative mission . . .

But let me add emphatically that we will not take sanctuary in a self-serving "no comment" when we err and the heat is on. Obviously, in a democracy a government agency such as the FBI has an obligation to account to the public in the discharge of its responsibilities. And we shall do so.