

Quiet Saxbe OK for FBI 'Message Control' Is Hit

Washington

An unannounced decision by the Justice Department giving tentative approval to begin enlarging its communication system had been denounced by the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy.

John M. Eger, acting director of the White House agency, has said he fears that the justice department decision "could result in the adsorption of state and local criminal data systems into a potentially abusive, centralized, federally controlled communications and computer information system."

The criticism was made in a letter to Attorney General William B. Saxbe. A copy of the letter was obtained by the New York Times.

"The growing federal role in this area not only would weaken the ability of other levels of government to manage their own affairs, but also raises concerns about the protection of individual rights," Eger wrote.

He also maintained that the tentative approval to the

FBI violated an understanding with Congress not to act on the communications project until complex legislation establishing limits and controls over the agency's National Crime Information Center had been worked out and approved by Congress.

The center is designed to give law enforcement agencies throughout the country almost immediate access to the criminal history of persons wanted by the police. But such questions as what kind of information will be included in the criminal histories, how long they will be held in the files and who will have access to them have not yet been resolved.

During hearings last March on the proposed legislation to set limits on the National Crime Information Center, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem-N.C.) chairman of the constitutional rights subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, debated with Clarence M. Kelley, the FBI director, about whether the capacity of the associated communi-

cations equipment should be enlarged.

The specific action criticized by the White House agency was the decision of deputy attorney general Laurence H. Silberman, in a memorandum to Kelley three weeks ago, that the FBI's National Crime Information Center could begin "limited message switching" after developing an action plan telling exactly what was to be done and how much it would cost.

Eger said the decision, if fully implemented, meant the FBI communications links would duplicate the facilities of the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, a long-existing cooperative program managed and paid for by the 50 states.

The official said that, should the FBI take over the functions of the state-run system, federal officials would be able "to monitor communications patterns between local and state law enforcement agencies."

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