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Levi Hints Laxity on Past Wiretaps

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 18 (UPI)—Attorney General Edward H. Levi suggested today that previous heads of the Justice Department may have made quick decisions in approving Federal Bureau of Investigation requests for warrantless "national security" wiretaps.

Mr. Levi, who has set up review procedures to insure that any surveillance conducted is necessary and actually involves foreign agents, said he began having suspicions about earlier practices the day he took office on Feb. 2, 1975.

"Just as I was settling into my chair and observing the handsome wood paneling in the office, an F.B.I. agent appeared at my door without announcement," Mr. Levi said in remarks prepared for the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

He said the agent had requested authorization of a warrantless national security wiretap and had waited for Mr. Levi to sign it.

"But I thought it was a bit unusual that I was expected to sign so automatically, if that really was the expectation," Mr. Levi said. He pointed out that his

personal approval was required by a standing executive order.

"I asked the agent to leave the request with me—I think, perhaps, to his surprise—so that I could consult other officials in the department," Mr. Levi said.

Mr. Levi said he had since set up a group to review wiretap requests before they reach him for a final decision. President Ford has proposed a law that would require selected Federal judges to review them also.

This legislation was approved by two Senate committees but died when Congress adjourned. Court warrants are already required for all "domestic security" wiretaps—ones that do not involve foreign agents.

The F.B.I. conducts the domestic surveillances as part of its own criminal investigations but usually the national security wiretaps are conducted for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Levi did not directly criticize his predecessors despite his suggestion that some may have made signed authorizations "automatically," and he emphasized that reforms were already being planned before he took office.