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Office of the White House Press Secretary
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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Legislation to protect personal privacy is making significant progress in the Congress. I am delighted about the prospect of House and Senate action at this session.

Renewed national efforts to strengthen protections for personal privacy should begin in Washington. We should start by enacting uniform fair information practices for the agencies of the Federal government. This will give us invaluable operating experience as we continue to examine and recommend needed actions at the State and local level and in the private sector.

The immediate objective should be to give every citizen the right to inspect, challenge and correct, if necessary, information about him contained in Federal agency records and to assure him a remedy for illegal invasions of privacy by Federal agencies accountable for safeguarding his records. In legislating, the right of privacy, of course, must be balanced against equally valid public interests in freedom of information, national defense, foreign policy, law enforcement, and in a high quality and trustworthy Federal work force.

Immediately after I assumed the chairmanship, as Vice President, of the Cabinet-level Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy, I asked the Office of Management and Budget to work jointly with the Committee staff, the Executive agencies and the Congress to work out realistic and effective legislation at the earliest possible time. Substantial progress has been made by both the Senate and the House on bills extending personal privacy protections to tens of millions of records containing personal information in hundreds of Federal data banks.

H. R. 16373, the Privacy Act of 1974, has my enthusiastic support, except for the provisions which allow unlimited individual access to records vital to determining eligibility and promotion in the Federal service and access to classified information. I strongly urge floor amendments permitting workable exemptions to accommodate these situations.

The Senate, also, has made substantial progress in writing privacy legislation. S. 3418 parallels the House bill in many respects, but I believe major technical and substantive amendments are needed to perfect the bill. I do not favor establishing a separate Commission or Board bureaucracy empowered to define privacy in its own terms and to second guess citizens and agencies. I vastly prefer an approach which makes Federal agencies fully and publicly accountable for legally mandated privacy protections and which gives the individual adequate legal remedies to enforce what he deems to be his own best privacy interests.

The adequate protection of personal privacy requires legislative and executive initiatives in areas not addressed by H. R. 16373 and S. 3418. I have asked Executive branch officials to continue to work with the Congress to assure swift action on measures to strengthen privacy and confidentiality in income tax records, criminal justice records and other areas identified as needed privacy initiatives by the Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy.

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