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THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

The Privacy Act of 1974, S. 3418, represents an initial advance in protecting a right precious to every American-- the right of individual privacy.

I am especially happy to have signed this bill because of my own personal concern in the privacy issue. As Chairman of the Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy, I became increasingly aware of the vital need to provide adequate and uniform privacy safeguards for the vast amounts of personal information collected, recorded and used in our complex society. It was my objective then, as it is today, to seek, first, opportunities to set the Federal house in order before prescribing remedies for State and local government and the private sector.

The Privacy Act of 1974 signified an historic beginning by codifying fundamental principles to safeguard personal privacy in the collection and handling of recorded personal information by Federal agencies. This bill, for the most part, strikes a reasonable balance between the right of the individual to be left alone and the interest of society in open government, national defense, foreign policy, law enforcement and a high quality and trustworthy Federal work force.

No bill of this scope and complexity -- particularly initial legislation of this type -- can be completely free of imperfections. While I am pleased that the Commission created by this law has been limited to purely advisory functions, I am disappointed that the provisions for disclosure of personal information by agencies make no substantive change in the current law. The latter in my opinion does not adequately protect the individual against unnecessary disclosures of personal information.

I want to congratulate the Congressional sponsors of this legislation and their staffs who have forged a strong bipartisan constituency in the interest of protecting the right of individual privacy. Experience under this legislation, as well as further exploration of the complexities of the issue, will no doubt lead to continuing Legislative and Executive efforts to reassess the proper balance between the privacy interests of the individual and those of society. I look forward to a continuation of the same spirit of bipartisan cooperation in the years ahead.

My Administration will act aggressively to protect the right of privacy for every American, and I call on the full support of all Federal personnel in implementing requirements of this legislation.

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