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Office of the White House Press Secretary
(San Antonio, Texas)

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT
UPON SIGNING S. 1160

The measure I sign today, S. 1160, revises Section 3 of the Administrative
Procedure Act to provide guidelines for the public availability of the records
of Federal departments and agencies.

This legislation springs from one of our most essential principles: a
democracy works best when the people have all the information that the
security of the nation permits. No one should be able to pull curtains of
secrecy around decisions which can be revealed without injury to the
public interest.

At the same time, the welfare of the Nation or the rights of individuals may
require that some documents not be made available. As long as threats to
peace exist, for example, there must be military secrets. A citizen must
be able in confidence to complain to his government and to provide information,
just as he is -- and should be -- free to confide in the press without fear of
reprimand or of being required to reveal or discuss his sources.

Fairness to individuals also requires that information accumulated in personnel
files be protected from disclosure. Officials within government must be able
to communicate with one another fully and frankly without publicity. They
cannot operate effectively if required to disclose information prematurely or to
make public investigative files and internal instructions that guide them in
arriving at their decisions.

I know that the sponsors of this bill recognize these important interests and
intend to provide for both the need of the public for access to information and
the need of government to protect certain categories of information. Both
are vital to the welfare of our people. Moreover, this bill in no way impairs
the President's power under our Constitution to provide for confidentiality
when the national interest so requires. There are some who have expressed
concern that the language of this bill will be construed in such a way as to
impair government operations. I do not share this concern.

I have always believed that freedom of information is so vital that only the
national security, not the desire of public officials or private citizens, should
determine when it must be restricted.

I am hopeful that the needs I have mentioned can be served by a constructive
approach to the wording and spirit and legislative history of this measure.
I am instructing every official in this Administration to cooperate to this end
and to make information available to the full extent consistent with individual
privacy and with the national interest.

I signed this measure with a deep sense of pride that the United States is an
open society in which the people's right to know is cherished and guarded.

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