

From the Office of
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HUMPHREY WARNS AGAINST GOVERNMENT'S "PLAGUE OF SECRECY"

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D.-Minn.) warned last night (Monday) that the habit of secrecy had become a sort of "plague" throughout the government -- "stifling the movement of ideas and denying even to officials charged with major decisions the facts they need to make intelligent choices."

Speaking at Phi Beta Kappa Founder's Day at West Virginia University, Senator Humphrey pointed out the obvious need for secrecy in certain sensitive areas, but he charged that "enthusiasm for secrecy as an end in itself" was bogging down the whole operation of government.

American science and industry, too, he warned, were being hamstrung "by the government's passion for withholding information."

Senator Humphrey declared, for example, that the Office of Strategic Information has been set up in the Commerce Department for the very purpose of cutting down on the flow of unclassified information. A similar approach has been carried over to the Defense Department by a directive as recently as September 9, 1955, he added.

"The question is," Senator Humphrey said, "whether we want to go to such lengths of withholding information about our industrial production."

"Just as science has thrived in an atmosphere of freedom, so our industry has grown in an atmosphere that permitted the constant interchange of information between industrialists about latest developments," Senator Humphrey told the audience in Morgantown, West Virginia.

"There is always the tendency on the part of those concerned with keeping important information from a potential enemy of thinking only in a very limited way about this problem. They quite rightly seek to withhold information -- that is their duty. But in keeping their eyes so firmly fixed on security, in the immediate sense, they fail to consider the long-term effects such measures may have on our nation.

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"Our national security also depends on the continued vitality and growth of science and industry," Senator Humphrey declared. "The strength of our national economy is one of the most important elements in our national security. Those who are charged with guarding our national security in the narrow sense are apt to overlook this larger meaning. It is for the rest of us to be on our guard that an excessive concern for secrecy does not vitiate the very elements of strength on which our national security is solidly founded."

Senator Humphrey stated that he was well aware of the need for taking measures to insure that some information does not fall into the hands of a hostile power. "We must guard against the dangers of Communism while preserving a free, democratic society," he declared.

Senator Humphrey told the West Virginia Phi Beta Kappa that there is danger in passing off the abridgements that have been made of our freedoms and personal liberties in recent years as merely temporary measures.

"For such measures," he said, "take root and have a way of perpetuating themselves and even growing to become something more than they were intended to be . . . If we indulge in an easy belief that some day such 'temporary' measures will be removed and we will once again have the old-style, trusting democracy we used to know we may be sadly mistaken. Only if we are vigilant, only if we recognize these invasions of our liberties for what they are, and actively work to correct abuses, can we hope some day to restore our nation to the free and open society it has traditionally been."

Senator Humphrey said, "We have entered into a new era, one in which we can seek to restore some of the dignity of the Constitutional principles and individual liberties that were so badly trod upon during the recent years of panic and exploitation."



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