

The United States has some 20,200 newspapers and magazines. In 1964 our daily and Sunday newspapers printed more than 18 billion copies. A single weekly news magazine currently claims almost 13 million readers. At the present time the number of broadcast radio and television stations operating in this country is 7,257. In the last few years extensive sales of automobile radios and small, portable transistor receivers have given a new mobility to the listening and viewing habits of our highly mobile society. It is estimated that there are now in regular use at least 62 million television sets and 214 million radio receivers—93 percent of all American homes are said to be equipped with television sets.

The increasing attention of Americans to public affairs is responsible in part for the expansion of our broadcast facilities. Broadcast industry spokesmen report a growing public demand, particularly in television, for the so-called public affairs specials, discussion programs, and interviews with public figures prominent in the news, as well as more complete news coverage generally.

Through our extensive communications facilities, the American public has become the best informed society in the history of the world. The real significance of this development lies in the strength which it adds to the fulfillment of the promise of American democracy. The steady flow of information concerning public affairs to all Americans, wherever located and whatever their status, is truly the lifeblood of our democratic system.

A genuine democracy is governed by the composite judgments of its people. Unless those judgments are informed judgments, of necessity the system ultimately will fail, and until such time as it does, it cannot be a real democracy without an informed public.

Therefore, where the press and other observers of public events may be wrongfully shut off from sources of information, democracy suffers.

Indeed, the damage wrought in any particular instance may be far greater than the denial of public understanding which results directly from nondisclosure. Unjustifiable secrecy in public affairs breeds distrust, suspicion, and rumor, and these are the most insidious of all enemies of enlightenment. No problem is of greater ultimate consequence to the success of our democratic system than the fundamental problem of public information.

The considerable frequency with which the President discusses developments, formally and informally, with representatives of the news media evidences his earnest desire to keep the public as fully informed as possible concerning governmental affairs. As for the Department of Justice, I can assure you that the Attorney General is determined that this Department shall stand second to none in making available to the American people, to the press, and to interested individuals all of the information in the possession of the Department which properly can be disclosed.

In general, I am sure that no group more fully appreciates the need for public understanding of the functions and operations of government than that relatively small body of individuals who are the heads of the Federal departments and agencies. Every such official knows or soon learns from some part of his own experience that nothing in public service can be more frustrating than to toil in an area of widespread public misunderstanding. In such situations he sees govern-