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17 March 1982

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¥TAM-AGENTS¥

¥BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON¥

WASHINGTON, MARCH 17, REUTER -- THE SENATE TODAY ENDORSED LEGISLATION THAT WOULD MAKE IT A CRIME FOR JOURNALISTS AND OTHERS TO REVEAL THE NAMES OF COVERT U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENTS UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES.

IT VOTED 55-39 FOR AN AMENDMENT TO TOUGHEN A PROPOSED SENATE BILL BY MAKING IT ILLEGAL FOR A PERSON TO IDENTIFY OR EXPOSE COVERT U.S. AGENTS IF THE PERSON HAD REASON TO BELIEVE THIS WOULD IMPAIR U.S. FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES.

THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE HAD URGED APPROVAL OF A LESS STRINGENT MEASURE THAT WOULD REQUIRE A PROSECUTOR TO PROVE THE DEFENDANT ACTUALLY INTENDED HARM TO INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES.

SENATORS MUST NOW VOTE TO ENACT THE BILL AS A WHOLE AND STAFF AIDES SAID THIS WAS LIKELY BECAUSE OF A WIDESPREAD BELIEF ON CAPITOL HILL THAT SECRET AGENTS MUST BE BETTER PROTECTED.

SINCE THE HOUSE HAS ALREADY PASSED A SIMILAR BILL, THE MEASURE WOULD GO TO PRESIDENT REAGAN FOR SIGNATURE ONCE IT PASSED THE SENATE.

THE ADMINISTRATION STRONGLY BACKS THE MEASURE, BUT GROUPS SUCH AS THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION SAY IT WOULD VIOLATE THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS TO REPORT THE NEWS.¥

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