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Right step on secrets

PRESIDENT Reagan's decision not to put into effect at this time a controversial plan to stem the leaking of government secrets is a good move — as far as it goes. It should go further. The administration should be certain that this particular edict is never put into effect. Its effect would be worse than the problem it is intended to solve.

The proposal was drawn up to stop government officials from revealing secrets that genuinely imperil national security, a problem of long standing. But the proposal went too far. It would have amounted to lifetime prepublication censorship of almost anything written by some 112,000 government officials. And it would have substantially increased the use of lie-detector tests on government officials.

When this plan was announced 11 months ago critics charged it violated the rights of individuals. In addition, through its prepublication section it would have had the effect of depriving the American public of the perspectives of veteran officials even after they have left government service on important issues at a time when such experience is particularly valuable.

The Reagan administration indicates it will work with Congress to develop another way to prevent the leaking of government secrets that compromise national security — but this time without violating the rights of individuals.

The issue is important. American security must be protected. But so must the legitimate rights of individuals.

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