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'Fear Detector' Tests

JOHN DE LOREAN'S first lie detector test was administered on Sept. 17 by his own defense team experts, and the former auto executive now charged in a cocaine case passed with flying colors. The second test was given this week by the FBI's top polygraph expert, and Mr. De Lorean failed. Surely this says something about the reliability of lie detector tests and indicates why most courts will not admit them as evidence in criminal trials. As one expert told a House subcommittee this week, "The instrument itself cannot detect deception. It's more of a fear detector than a lie detector."

Why then does the administration persist in its decision to expose to the possibility of these tests some 2.5 million civilian and military federal employees and 1.5 million employees of government contractors with security clearances? Under an executive order issued last March and clarified by the Justice Department's Richard Willard in congressional testimony Wednesday, all these individuals could be compelled to take the tests in an investigation of crime or administrative misconduct—meaning leaks.

Mr. Willard suggests the tests also can be administered as a condition of employment or of access to classified material and, on occasion thereafter, to randomly selected individuals as a condition of maintaining access. All this for about 4 million people whose conduct has given no indication that

they are anything but loyal, trustworthy citizens.

No less offensive is the other half of the secrecy directive issued last spring. It would require prepublication clearance of material prepared by any current or former government employee with access to "sensitive compartmented information."

More than 113,000 federal employees in various agencies would have to sign lifetime prepublication agreements and to submit for clearance any material "prepared for disclosure to others" that might contain classified information or information regarding intelligence activities, sources or methods. The regulation covers written material ranging from letters to the editor, to pamphlets, to fiction. Oral statements based on written outlines must be cleared. So must material prepared by "a ghost writer, spouse or friend" with the assistance of the government employee.

The sweep of these directives and their potential for censorship and official abuse are staggering. Consider—one special case—political appointees forced to submit material for prepublication review to their successors. There is simply no evidence that trusted people in the government, including those who had responsibility for the nation's security, have been abusing that trust to an extent that warrants this wholesale censorship apparatus. The security directive itself poses a far greater threat to the country's liberties, free institutions and central values.