

ABC NEWS TONIGHT
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GOVERNMENT
LEAKS

BELL: Richard Threlkeld has more on government leaks, a virtual art form in this city.

THRELKELD: Frank Snapp is unemployed. He's an author who can't write a book or give a speech or teach a class without first clearing it with a government censor ever, for the rest of his life. He used to be with the CIA, and he wrote a book critical of it without clearing it with the CIA censor just in case he'd revealed some secrets. He didn't reveal any, but the Supreme Court decided he violated his agreement with the CIA and ordered him to turn over all his book and movie royalties, \$180,000, to the government. Now he says he feels like one of those South African dissidents, banned. SNEPP: When someone cannot speak, talk, get a job because he's offended the regime, he's called banned. Well, that's what's happened to me.

THRELKELD: Last month the Reagan administration started applying the Snapp rule to tens of thousands of Frank Snapps still in government, anybody with access to top secrets. They'll all have to take a pledge not to leak secrets and take a lie detector test if they're suspected of it and let the censors go over anything they ever write or say about their service. RICHARD WILLARD (Department of Justice): We have had a problem of too much classified information leaking out one way or another, some from negligence, some from deliberate disclosures.

THRELKELD: Mr. Willard, whose committee recommended the crackdown, insists the leaks have been damaging but can't say exactly how. That's secret. Certainly there are a lot of national secrets that ought to stay that way, but which ones? There are an estimated 16 million national secrets. At one time, even the White House dinner menu was secret. Strictly enforced, the no-leak rule would require a whole library of books by government movers and shakers past and present to go to

the censor. It would require Walter Mondale, for one, to have his presidential campaign speeches censored. Washington has always been a veritable sieve of leaks, and the most incorrigible leakers have been our presidents. John Kennedy remarked that America is the only ship of state that leaks from the top. Just last month, Ronald Reagan leaked some pictures showing the Russians in Cuba and the Cubans in Nicaragua. REAGAN: These pictures only tell a small part of the story. I wish I could show you more without compromising our most sensitive intelligence sources and methods.

THRELKELD: And the way the White House figures it, from now on, there'll only be one leaker. You can leak if the president wants to leak or the president says it's okay. WILLARD: That's the president's authority in our system of government, and the only alternative to that would be to have anarchy where every government employee could decide the question for himself.

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