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20th Century Fund Proposes Watchdog on Press

By RICHARD MATHIEU

A national news council whose main duty would be to investigate public complaints against organizations that gather and publish the news was proposed yesterday by an independent task force of the Twentieth Century Fund.

The task force report, released at the fund's offices, 41 E. 70th St., said the idea was to promote freedom of the press.

In addition to receiving complaints against newspapers, wire services and television and radio stations, the proposed council would also "act to defend the press when either government or public sources threaten the freedom of the press to gather or report news," the report said.

Although the task force recommended that regional news councils also be set up in time, it stressed the need for a national council as the proper way to begin the investigation of complaints.

The recommendations were expected to be greeted with mixed

reactions by the nation's media, which have always prided themselves on self-policing.

The task force named Roger Traynor, former chief justice of the California Supreme Court, as head of a committee to draw up plans for the council. It was expected that the council will begin operations early in 1973, according to M. J. Rossant, director of the fund.

The need for the council was explained this way in the report:

"Because it found a growing concentration of news organizations in the United States and an apparent unresponsiveness to public pressure and criticism, the task force called for a national body that will be free of govern-

ment control of journalistic influence."

Members of the task force are: Lucy Wilson Benson, national president of the League of Women Voters; C. Donald Peterson, associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court; Barry Bingham, Louis

ville Courier Journal; Stimson Bullitt, King Broadcasting Co., Seattle; Hodding Carter 3d, Delta (Miss.) Democrat Times; Robert Chandler, Bend (Ore.) Bulletin; Ithiel de Sola Pool, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Hartford N. Gunn, Public Broadcasting System; Richard Harwood, Washington Post; Louis Martin, Chicago Defender; John B. Oakes, New York Times; Paul Reardon, associate justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court; Richard Salant, CBS News, and Jesse Unruh, Los Angeles.