

"Ladies and gentlemen. The very word "secrecy" is repugnant in a free and open society. And we are as a people, inherently and historically, opposed to secret societies, to secret oaths, and to secret proceedings. We decided long ago, that the dangers of excessive and unwarranted concealment of pertinent facts far outweigh the dangers which are cited to justify it. Even today, there is little value in opposing the thread of a closed society by imitating its arbitrary restrictions. Even today, there is little value in assuring the survival of our nation if our traditions do not survive with it. And there is very grave danger that an announced need for increased security will be seized upon by those anxious to expand its meaning to the very limits of official censorship and concealment.

That I do not intend to permit to the extent that it's in my control. And no official of my administration whether his rank is high or low, civilian or military, should interpret my words here tonight as an excuse to censor the news, to stifle dissent, to cover up our mistakes, or to withhold from the press or the public the facts they deserve to know.

For we are opposed around the world by a monolithic and ruthless conspiracy that relies primarily on covert means for expanding its sphere of influence, on infiltration instead of invasion, on subversion instead of elections, on intimidation instead of free choice, on guerrillas by night instead of armies by day.

It is a system which has conscripted vast human and material resources into the building of a tightly knit highly efficient machine that combines military, diplomatic, intelligence, economic, scientific and political operations. Its preparations are concealed, not published. Its mistakes are buried, not headlined. Its dissenters are silenced, not praised. No expenditure is questioned, no rumor is printed, no secret is revealed.

No President should fear public scrutiny of his program. For from that scrutiny comes understanding, and from that understanding comes support or opposition, and both are necessary.

I'm not asking your newspapers to support an administration. But I am asking your help in the tremendous task of informing and alerting the American people. For I have complete confidence in the response and dedication of our citizens whenever they are fully informed.

I not only could not stifle controversy among your readers, I welcome it. This administration intends to be candid about its errors. For as a wise man once said, an error doesn't become a mistake until you refuse to correct it. We intend to accept full responsibility for our errors. And we expect you to point them out when we miss them.

Without debate, without criticism, no administration and no country can succeed, and no republic can survive. That is why the Athenian lawmaker, Solon, decreed it a crime for any citizen to shrink from controversy.

That is why our press was protected by the First Amendment, the only business in America specifically protected by the Constitution, not primarily to amuse and to entertain, not to emphasize the trivial and the sentimental, not to simply give the public what it wants, but to inform, to arouse, to reflect, to state our dangers and our opportunities, to indicate our crisis and our choices, to lead, mold, educate and sometimes even anger public opinion.

This means greater coverage and analysis of international news, for it is no longer far away and foreign, but close at hand and local. It means greater attention to improve the understanding of the news as well as improve transmission. And it means finally that government at all levels must meet its obligation to provide you with the fullest possible information outside the narrowest limits of national security.

And so it is to the printing press, to the recorder of man's deeds, the keeper of his conscience, the courier of his news, that we look for strength and assistance. Confident that with your help, man will be what he was born to be, free and independent." - J. F. Kennedy