

Information law to test bureaucrats-- Fox

By Daniel Stoffman Toronto Star

Federal bureaucrats will have to be dragged "kicking and screaming" into compliance with Ottawa's new freedom of information laws, Communications Minister Francis Fox says.

Fox told the Toronto Liberal Forum yesterday it will require "political will" by the government to overcome bureaucratic resistance to opening government records to the public.

"The normal tendency is for the bureaucracy to pull the government back from freedom of information legislation," he said.

Fox is responsible for the Access to Information and Privacy Bill which is supposed to make more information on government activities public while at the same time protect the privacy of individuals.

After the meeting Fox said the justice committee of the House of Commons won't be finished with the bill until next year and even after it is passed by Parliament, there will be a six-month delay before it becomes effective.

Svend Robinson, New Democratic Party justice critic, said Tuesday that Fox is deliberately stalling the bill's implementation. But the minister said the delay is necessary to establish the administrative mechanics of the program, which will cost about \$10 million a year.

The bill has been criticized for having too many exemptions but Fox said details of the legislation are less important than its philosophy, which is that Canadians have a right to see government records, and cabinet ministers and officials do not have the right to decide what infor-



Francis Fox: Bureaucratic resistance to law inevitable, communications minister says.

mation they shouldn't see.

In the short run, Fox said, the new law will make life "more uncomfortable for the government."

"I don't think there's an embarrassing document in existence that will not come out. But it, might as well come out in an organized scheme of things than in a brown paper envelope slipped to the leaders of the opposition parties."

"There's going to be so much information made available it will be difficult to decide which ones should make the headlines."

Fox said one of the most important aspects of the bill is that ministers will no longer be able to claim "national security" as an excuse for not releasing information.