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Politicians Should Leave OSBI Alone

MUCH of the static concerning the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI) is being generated by people who do not want certain individuals or groups investigated.

When this has happened in the past, political figures concerned with parties involved have turned on the rhetoric, charging OSBI with politically motivated investigations, head hunting and witch hunting.

It is apparent that this is precisely what some present critics want the OSBI to do, except that they want probes directed toward their political foes; not toward their friends.

It is possible that OSBI in the past may have been utilized or restrained, as cases may have indicated, for political purposes, but that is not its legal reason for existence and that is not in accord with stated intentions of Gov. David Boren and OSBI Director Jeff R. Laird.

From the beginning of Boren's administration, it has been made plain that the objective of OSBI is to build

a branch of law enforcement that can effectively work with and assist other agencies in stemming the increasing crime wave in the state.

Last year, the legislature responded to this goal by holding up the OSBI appropriation until the last day of the session, and then reducing OSBI funds for the current year by more than \$200,000. The legislature cut back on law enforcement!

Now some of the same legislators are joining in criticism of OSBI for not providing additional services needed. Boren has called for expansion, but legislators become highly economy-minded regarding an agency that could turn the spotlight on their own extracurricular activities, or on those of their friends.

With its limited staff, OSBI responded to more than 5,000 requests for law enforcement assistance in the last half of 1975. Laird has said that resources and facilities of OSBI are not sufficient to provide all of the services necessary or desirable.

Even so, investigative activities of

OSBI seem to have been more than enough to suit certain state and local officials. They have applied pressure that forced the chief agent to request voluntary demotion and have attacked the integrity and motives of the agency.

Legislators have proposed a "watchdog committee," composed of five members from local law enforcement agencies and two from the public. It would oversee operations of OSBI, guarding against possible use of powers for political or other improper motives.

Such a committee should be acceptable, providing the personnel is acceptable, but a weak minority of two from the public is not enough. The public deserves stronger representation.

The OSBI can and should render much-needed impetus to the war on crime, but it cannot do so if it is inadequately funded or if it is restricted by political influences which might declare law-breaking friends or cohorts to be off-limits.