

PUBLIC INTEREST DECLASSIFICATION BOARD

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

April 27, 2007

The Public Interest Declassification Board (PIDB) held its twelfth meeting on Friday, April 27, 2007. This meeting was held in Room 509, of the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. L. Britt Snider, Chairman of the PIDB, chaired the meeting. Board Members present were Martin Faga, Steven Garfinkel, Joan Vail Grimson, Elizabeth Rindskopf Parker, Ronald Radosh, David E. Skaggs, and William O. Studeman. Also present: William J. Bosanko, Associate Director, Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO), serving as Acting Executive Secretary for the PIDB; Dr. Michael Kurtz, Assistant Archivist for Records Services, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Patricia A. Frye, Kristofer L. Johnson, and Lee H. Morrison, ISOO, serving as the PIDB staff.

I. Welcome and Updates

The Chair welcomed the members and introduced Dr. Ronald Radosh, who was appointed to the Board by the President on April 10, 2007. Dr. Radosh spoke about his background and experiences. Mr. Bosanko then spoke about funding for the PIDB and discussed recently introduced legislation concerning the PIDB. Mr. Bosanko reminded the members that their financial disclosure forms are due to NARA's Office of General Counsel by May 15, 2007. He also noted that the members who had recently received security clearances would receive their security briefings at the next PIDB meeting. The Board members also approved the minutes of the February 24, 2007 PIDB meeting.

II. Proposal for a National Declassification Center

The Chair turned to Dr. Kurtz for his presentation of "The National Declassification Center: A Proposal for the Public Interest Declassification Board." Dr. Kurtz spoke about the value of interagency cooperation, equity identification, quality assurance, and the progress thus far with the development of the National Declassification Initiative (NDI). He handed out a chart that described a National Declassification Center lifecycle plan. The Board Members expressed general support for the concept, but also raised areas of concern and asked that such issues be addressed in a revised proposal. Specifically, they were concerned with the costs, the intended efficiencies, what would be produced, expectations, processing times, the role with respect to agency historians, etc. The Chair indicated that the basic concept would be one that the Board would be considering for its planned report to the President and asked Dr. Kurtz to provide a revised proposal in the coming months. The Chair also requested updates regarding the NDI as well as the declassification of "9/11 Commission" records for the June meeting. The Chair thanked Dr. Kurtz for his presentation and moved on to the next item on the agenda.

III. Finalization of Proposed Changes to the PIDB Bylaws to Address Requests for Declassification Reviews

The Chair opened the discussion by reviewing several alternative proposals for revisions to the bylaws that had been developed by the members and staff in the recent past. Substantial discussion followed weighing the pros and cons of a broad role for the Board versus a role that is very narrow in scope. The Board members agreed that they needed to be farsighted with regards to how Congressional requests are treated. The Board members decided to incorporate elements from each of the proposals into a new proposal to be developed by the staff. The Chair indicated that a draft of the revised bylaws and a draft of a cover letter back to the National Security Advisor to transmit the final, approved bylaws would be distributed to the Board members shortly.

IV. Discussion Concerning Board Recommendations

The Chair made a proposal for gathering recommendations for a report to the President in the Fall. Specifically, he proposed that he and the staff use the months of July and August to work on issue papers that would explore specific problems within the classification system. Each paper would identify an issue and put forward possible recommendations. The Board would then meet, perhaps for two days, to discuss each issue and determine what issues will be covered in the report. The Chair had previously provided his initial thoughts on possible topics, but stressed the need for further discussion at the meeting to ensure that any additional issues as well as and any additional data gathering efforts that may be required could be identified. The Board then discussed a variety of topics, to include the following:

- Review of recommendations from past reviews of secrecy issues.
- Creation of internal advocate or ombudsman positions at agencies.
- Review of methods of managing information in an electronic age, particularly with regard to non-government systems of control and access. For example, initiatives for scanning and making available declassified documents, to include the possibility of partnerships with information technology companies and educational entities.
- How the classification system works in the United Kingdom.
- Recommendations from the media.
- How the truly historic documents are identified.
- How to evaluate the truly limited time sensitivity of many classified documents.
- The possibility of extending the duration of original classification decisions, but limiting the exceptions available for eventual automatic declassification.
- The future of the classification system; statute versus Executive order.
- Declassification of the President's Daily Brief.
- How declassification works at the Presidential Libraries.
- Input from the historian community on declassification priorities.

V. Scheduling of Future Meetings

The Board generally agreed to meet again on Friday, May 18, 2007, Friday, June 22, 2007, July 27, 2007, and September 28 and 29, 2007.

VI. Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 5:05 p.m.