



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 10, 2007

Dear Mr. Snider:

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with members of the Board on February 24. I think we had a very fruitful discussion, and I hope we can do it again at an appropriate time.

As promised, I checked with Presidential Personnel about the pending appointment of Ronald Radosch to the Board, and his appointment was announced today. I am also enclosing, as we discussed, some suggestions for studies the Board might wish to consider, which could provide useful suggestions for improving the government's security classification programs. I would be pleased to have your views about the feasibility of the Board taking on one or more these studies in addition to your assessments of the classification and declassification programs at individual agencies, which we look forward to receiving.

We agreed during our discussion that I would defer making a recommendation to the President regarding the pending request from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for the Board to undertake a declassification review until the Board has an opportunity to develop by-laws for undertaking such reviews. I look forward to receiving a copy of your by-laws governing such reviews so that the President can make a fully informed decision about the pending request.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Hadley
Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

Enclosure

Mr. L. Britt Snider
Chairman
Public Interest Declassification Board
c/o Information Security Oversight Office
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Room 503
Washington, D.C. 20408-0001

Suggested PIDB Projects

During his meeting with the Board on February 24, Steve Hadley volunteered to suggest some studies that the Board might undertake to improve the effectiveness of the government's security classification programs. The topics discussed briefly below would be in addition to the Board's ongoing assessments of the classification/declassification program at individual agencies.

1. There is a potential crisis associated with the looming December 2009 deadline for automatic declassification of all third agency records (i.e., those that must be reviewed by more than one agency). What is your assessment of this situation? Will agencies be able to meet this deadline? If not, what policy changes would you recommend?
2. Virtually all observers agree that too many documents are classified in the first instance. What recommendations would you make to improve the reliability of original classification decisions? Is it possible to tighten the definition of information that qualifies for classification without risking damage to the national security? Are there other factors that can and should realistically be considered in making the original classification decision, such as cost of protection, vulnerability, value of the information, and public benefit from release?
3. What are the potential benefits and shortcomings of establishing a National Declassification Center -- or perhaps a Declassification Center for all Defense Department or all Intelligence Community records -- as a means of ensuring more efficient, consistent, and timely declassification of appropriate documents? How would such Centers operate to ensure efficiencies as well as reliability?
4. One stated purpose of the Board is "to provide recommendations to the President for the identification, collection, and review for declassification of information of extraordinary public interest. . . ." Is it desirable or feasible to develop government-wide subject matter priorities for systematic declassification review by agencies, such as review of all records on the War of Ideas during the Cold War, which could be particularly useful given the current war against terrorism? How would such priorities be developed?