

## Public Interest Declassification Board

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### EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

William J. Bosanko

July 21, 2009

General James L. Jones, USMC, Ret.  
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear General Jones,

As members of the Public Interest Declassification Board (PIDB), with the statutory responsibility to promote “the fullest possible public access” to Federal records, we were pleased to fulfill your request of 2 June to solicit recommendations for revisions to Executive Order 12958, as amended, “Classified National Security Information.” We hope our efforts will further the Administration’s goal of making the Federal Government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative.

In order to meet your request, the PIDB set up the Declassification Policy Forum to solicit public comment online through the White House Open Government Initiative. This enabled discussion focused on four topics: Declassification Policy, Creating a National Declassification Center, Classification Policy, and Technology Challenges and Opportunities. The Forum was launched on 28 June, and has received over 150 detailed recommendations. The online discussion was complemented by the recommendations and observations offered at a public meeting we held on 8 July at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

After reviewing the comments posted to the Forum and discussing the public’s remarks from our meeting, we have identified four key themes raised most frequently, which happen to be consistent with recommendations we provided in our 2007 Report, *Improving Declassification*:

- Return to a presumption of openness
- Define how a National Declassification Center (NDC) would be operated by the Archivist of the United States, working with the departments and agencies
- Set more precise definitions of what remains classified and what continues to be exempted from declassification even with the passage of time, with greater constraint on the use of “sources and methods” as a justification for continued classification
- Effect consistency, uniformity and efficiency in the declassification review process

For your further review, we have attached a summary of the recommendations we received from the public on the Forum, via e-mail, and at the meeting. This summary is meant to capture what this sample of the public stated, and it reflects their diverse views.

Many expressed interest in commenting on the final draft of the Executive Order before it is signed by the President. We believe that continued public participation has merit and is in accordance with the President's policies on open government and transparency. If deemed appropriate, the Declassification Policy Forum could easily facilitate such public comment.

Our views have been greatly enhanced by the comments we received from the public. With these recommendations in mind, and mindful that there are also major equities on the side of classification, we will provide you with a follow up letter containing specific thoughts and recommendations on changes to classification and declassification policy.

We look forward to continuing to assist you in implementing policies that promote openness and public access to Government information. If you desire, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these important issues with you or your staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Faga". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Martin C. Faga  
Acting PIDB Chair

Enclosure