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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Release of the ISOO Audit of Reclassification Programs at the National Archives April 26, 2006

Today, the House Government Reform Committee received a briefing on the results of an audit conducted by the Information Security Oversight Office at the National Archives and Records Administration. The audit was initiated after independent researchers disclosed that documents that had been publicly available on the shelves of the National Archives had been pulled and retroactively classified.

The audit shows that the reclassification effort was much more extensive than previously known. Instead of just one or two re-classification programs, the audit discovered at least ten. And these programs involved over 25,000 documents, more than twice as many as previously known. Of these, the audit concluded that 34% should not have been pulled from the shelves.

In addition, instead of attributing these problems just to miscommunications and bureaucratic oversights, the audit found that Executive Branch officials — specifically at the CIA — retroactively classified documents they knew contained no classified information whatsoever. The audit found that this was done to “obfuscate” their efforts. As the audit stated: “deliberate decisions were made to make it appear to the public that the Government did consider such documents to be classified.” The audit found that these actions were clear violations of law, and that these officials intentionally breached the provisions of Executive Order 12958.

I commend the National Archives for launching this investigation and for reporting the results in today’s audit. But this is only part of the story. Today, I have asked for, and the National Archives has committed to providing, the names of the officials who were in charge of each of the ten reclassification programs identified in the audit. I have also asked for hearings in our Committee to find out why the Administration has not held these officials accountable for their violations.

Today’s audit expresses deep concern about the government’s reclassification actions, concluding: “[t]he damage such practices can inflict on the integrity of the classification system cannot be denied.”

Under the Bush Administration, the American people have been subjected to a double-standard on classified information. In addition to vastly overclassifying government documents, the Bush Administration aggressively attacks leaks of classified information it finds embarrassing, even when those leaks disclose illegal activity. But at the same time, the Administration ignores leaks from within the White House and even encourages them for political gain. These double standards are eroding public confidence and undermining our national security.