

SECRETARY

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 19, 1997

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, March 19, 1997 into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

GOVERNMENT SECRECY

For many years during the Cold War, the United States took extraordinary steps to restrict the access of American citizens to national security information. By limiting certain information only to government officials specially cleared to see it, we tried to keep it out of the hands of our adversaries. This system of protecting information helped keep us more secure.

But the end of the Cold War has given us an opportunity to reassess the role and costs of government secrecy. Certainly restricting access to military plans and weapon designs made sense, but in many ways too much information was kept secret, with even the menu for a dinner party hosted by a U.S. official once classified. I have come to the view that it is an urgent national priority to reform the government's existing system of secrecy. We must bring the system for classifying, safeguarding, and declassifying national security information into line with our view of American democracy and the threats it faces in the post-Cold War world.

SECRETARY IN GOVERNMENT TODAY

It is remarkable that Congress has never passed a law specifically setting up the process governing secrecy. Since 1947, decisions on what information should be kept secret have been governed entirely by presidential executive orders. The President relies on his constitutional authority for conducting foreign policy and protecting national security to issue such orders, but there are no laws that tell the President how to classify anything.

Under the current system, tens of thousands of U.S. officials are authorized to classify information. Every year they stamp "secret" on several million new documents. Warehouses now hold an astonishing 1.5 billion pages of classified documents that are more than 25 years old, but only a few hundred officials are assigned to review these documents for declassification. The backlog of secret documents grows year after year.

PROBLEMS OF EXCESSIVE SECRECY

All of us recognize that in a dangerous world some secrecy is vital to save lives, to protect national security, to engage in effective diplomacy, and to bring criminals to justice. But we should also understand the immense costs of secrecy. Government agencies and private firms spend \$5-6 billion annually to manage and protect classified material. Reviewing older documents for declassification is time-consuming and expensive.

Excessive secrecy cripples debate in a free society. Policymakers are not fully informed and government is not held accountable for its actions. Too often I have had the impression that information has been made secret not to protect national security, but to protect officials and their policy decisions from public inquiry.

Information and open debate are the lifeblood of democracy. Surely one of the keys to a successful democracy is to assure that the people are adequately informed about the issues of the day. Openness and publicity may cause some inconvenience, perhaps even some losses from time to time, but I believe openness and accountability will greatly in-

crease the chances that we will avoid major mistakes.

I also believe that a culture of secrecy threatens our capacity to keep secrets that must be kept. As former Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said, "When everything is classified then nothing is classified." If we have too much secrecy, we cannot focus enough on protecting the truly important secrets. Secrecy can best be preserved when the credibility of the system is assured.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

The key then is to strike an appropriate balance. We need to reduce sharply the level of secrecy within our government and make available to the American people millions of documents that have been maintained in secrecy. On the other hand, we want to safeguard better the information necessary to protect our nation and our citizens, information that is critical to the pursuit of our national security. Such a classification system should protect our national security in a reasonable and cost-effective manner.

President Clinton has taken some useful steps to try to reduce government secrecy. He shortened the number of years that most documents may remain secret and gave agencies five years to declassify most documents in their possession that are older than 25 years. The President also ordered the release of millions of World War II-era documents. Unfortunately, there has been resistance to the President's reforms. Some agencies have been slow to adopt new classification procedures, and several are behind schedule on meeting the five-year declassification target.

During the past two years I have served on a twelve-member commission on government secrecy made up of private citizens, Executive Branch officials, and Members of Congress. The commission concluded that current policies have encouraged secrecy, and we made several recommendations to improve the classification process.

First, we need to pass a law establishing broad standards for appropriate classification and declassification. A statute would give the secrecy system greater stability and inspire greater respect than the numerous presidential executive orders issued since World War II. Second, we should create a Declassification Center within the National Archives. It would declassify documents under the guidance of national security agencies, and should eventually be able to declassify more documents, at a lower cost, than individual agencies can today. Third, officials who classify documents should be specially trained to weigh the benefits of public access against the need to protect a particular piece of information, and they should provide a written justification when information is classified for the first time. Fourth, to strengthen individual accountability, officials should be required to identify themselves by name on the documents they classify, and classification should be a regular part of job performance evaluations. Finally, a single Executive Branch agency should be put in charge of coordinating classification policies governmentwide. This agency must have the authority to demand compliance with Administration policies.

CONCLUSION

The Cold War has ended, and so has the justification for a vast array of secrets whose very existence is contrary to free and open government. It is time for a new way of thinking about secrecy. The best way to ensure that secrecy is respected is for secrecy to be returned to a limited but necessary role. We will better protect necessary secrets, and our democracy, if secrecy is reduced overall.

HIGH SCHOOL CHEERLEADING CHAMPIONS

HON. HOWARD COBLE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 19, 1997

Mr. COBLE. Mr. Speaker, as we are in the middle of what is known as March Madness, all eyes are focused on the basketball arenas of America. An integral part of what makes the game so much fun and adds to the fans' excitement are the cheerleaders. These young men and women who exhort the crowd to support their team add much to the pageantry of college basketball and, for that matter, all sports.

We are particularly mindful of the contributions that cheerleaders make to the enjoyment of all types of sports these days because the Sixth District of North Carolina is the home of the 1996-97 North Carolina high school cheerleading champions. Southwestern Randolph High School [SWRHS] near Asheboro, NC, last month captured the State 2-A cheerleading championship. This championship is all the more special because it came in the final year of Coach LuEllen Loflin's tremendous career at SWRHS. Led by Loflin, the Cougars have won North Carolina's 2-A cheerleading championship 5 of the past 6 years and 6 of the past 8.

As written in the Asheboro Courier-Tribune:

For the past 15 years, Loflin has been involved as the coach of the varsity cheerleaders, a span of time which has seen cheerleading evolve from a group of girls who jump up during sporting events to a group of skilled athletes who spend hundreds of hours each year perfecting dance routines loaded with acrobatics and precision maneuvers.

Members of her squad told the Courier-Tribune that Coach Loflin will be missed. "She's a pillar of support and confidence and love and friendship and all those wonderful adjectives," senior cocaptain Christine Copple told the Asheboro newspaper. "She's one of us," fellow cocaptain Lisa Sizemore told the Courier-Tribune about Coach Loflin. "We can all go to her and talk about anything. She's a second mother to us. Without her, we wouldn't be where we are today." Darian Walker, the lone male on the team, was pleased to capture another trophy for a great coach. "To come back and win it one more time before Miss Loflin left was really great," Walker said. "It was one of the best feelings I ever had."

In addition to Copple, Sizemore, and Walker, every member of the Cougar cheerleading squad is to be congratulated for a championship season, including senior captain Melissa Pritchard, and fellow seniors Nicki McKensie, Stephanie Stone, and Amy Sykes; juniors Sara Knapp and Alicia Miller; sophomores Katie Copple, Misty Cox, Ann Culpepper, and Jamie Parrish; and freshmen Kelly Bryant and Marie Nance.

After 15 years of dedicated service to SWRHS, LuEllen Loflin will step down as coach of the cheerleading squad. She leaves a tremendous legacy of achievement. On behalf of the citizens of the Sixth District of North Carolina, we congratulate Coach Loflin and the Southwestern Randolph Cougars for winning the 2-A high school cheerleading championship.