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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

Mr. Michael Grehl
Editor
Memphis Commercial Appeal
495 Union Avenue
Memphis, TN 38101

Dear Mr. Grehl:

In recent weeks my remarks concerning the Freedom of Information Act have been repeatedly distorted. I have never advocated the total repeal of the Freedom of Information Act. I have, however, repeatedly stressed that there is an inherent incompatibility in applying an openness in government law to intelligence agencies whose missions must be carried out in secrecy.

The receipt of an FOIA request by an intelligence agency begins a lengthy process of searching numerous compartmented record systems and then reviewing any responsive documents. This careful review requires the time and attention of senior intelligence officials, thus diverting them from their primary duties. Despite these efforts, there is always the possibility of human error which could result in the release of classified information damaging to the national security. Moreover, the necessity to engage in this search and review is disturbing to friendly foreign intelligence services as well as to individual sources of information. Due to the existing exemptions in the Act, FOIA releases for the most part consist of scattered words and phrases. These fragmented releases are subject to misinterpretation and intentional misuse.

More importantly, the benefit to the public from FOIA releases is marginal. I fail to see how releases of bits of information serve the purpose of the FOIA to provide government accountability. The intelligence agencies have more direct executive branch and congressional oversight than any other

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agency within our government. Thus, the necessary accountability and oversight of intelligence activities is fully provided for by our elected officials who, unlike the public, have access to all classified information.

As U.S. District Court Judge Gerhardt Gesell said after reviewing Philip Agee's FOIA request for the release of 8,600 documents, "It is amazing that a rational society tolerates the expense, the waste of resources, the potential injury to its own security which this case necessarily entails."

Sincerely,

William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence

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