

Report: Government Keeping More Secrets

By JENNIFER C. KERR, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - Government secrecy has increased sharply in the past few years -- keeping Americans in the dark about information they should be able to access, says a report released Thursday by a coalition of watchdog groups. It found the federal government created 14 million new classified documents in fiscal year 2003 -- a 26 percent increase over the number of documents stamped secret in 2002, and a 60 percent increase over 2001. Those numbers cover over 40 agencies, but exclude the CIA.

At the same time, the government is declassifying fewer documents, the report said. Some 43 million pages were declassified in 2003, down from 44 million the year before -- and a significant decrease from 2001 when 100 million pages were declassified.

"There are secrets that are necessary, but there are a heck of a lot of secrets that are being kept secret that the public would benefit from, with their disclosure," said Rick Blum, coalition coordinator for OpenTheGovernment.org and author of the report.

Blum said secrecy is not just a Bush administration problem. He said the recent spike began in 2000 during the Clinton administration.

"Clearly, we in the government classify too much," said J. William Leonard, director of the Information Security Oversight Office at the National Archives. His office monitors the government's security classification process.

Leonard said the higher number of classified materials may be a result of a government that is working harder and producing more documents in a post-Sept 11 world, with a military fighting the war on terrorism. "It doesn't necessarily represent a propensity toward secrecy," he said.

But he added that agencies are too quick to automatically apply classification.

The coalition measured the scope of government secrecy by examining federal data on documents classified and declassified over the last nine years. It also looked at the money spent on classification and the number of requests from the public for information under the Freedom of Information Act.

More than \$6.5 billion was spent making documents secret last year, while only \$53 million financed declassification projects, the report said.

The coalition also found a steady rise in the number of public requests for information from the government in the last five years, with more than 3 million requests in 2003 -- up from 869,000 in 1998.

The coalition is based in Washington and comprised of groups representing consumers, environmentalists, labor, journalists and librarians concerned about government secrecy.

On the Net: The report can be found at OpenTheGovernment.org

USA Today 2,280,761
Los Angeles Times 914,584
The Boston Globe 450,538
Philadelphia Inquirer 376,493
San Diego Union-Tribune 328,531
Newsday, NY 580,348
Miami Herald 304,795
Bradenton Herald, FL 37,350
Fort Worth Star Telegram 215,452
Seattle Post Intelligencer 150,851
St. Paul Pioneer Press 189,459
Duluth News Tribune, MN 46,670
Tallahassee Democrat 49,573

Wilkes Barre Times-Leader, PA 49,806
Centre Daily Times, PA 25,969
Charlotte Observer (NC), 8A 226,849
Myrtle Beach Sun News, SC ?
Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, GA 45,661
Macon Telegraph, GA 64,396
Biloxi Sun Herald, MS 49,200
Lexington Herald-Leader 106,941
Akron Beacon Journal 134,401
Fort Wayne Journal Gazette 60,068
Wichita Eagle (KS) 87,366
Kansas City Star (MO) 267,273
Monterey County Herald, CA 34,197

San Luis Obispo Tribune, CA ?
Grand Forks Herald, ND 33,828
San Mateo Daily Journal (CA) 15,000
Corvallis Gazette-Times (OR) 13,170
Dow Jones Newswire
KRON-TV-4 Online, San Francisco
Salon.com
Contra Costa Times (CA)
New Jersey Record, A-16
Arizona Daily Star
Indianapolis Star

Watchdog Groups: US Govt Keeping More Secrets

Charlotte Observer. **Friday, August 27, 2004** (Additional shorter version of AP article)

A section: NATION

Government classifying more documents WASHINGTON -- Government secrecy has increased sharply in the past few years -- keeping Americans in the dark about information they should be able to access, says a report released Thursday by a coalition of watchdog groups.

It found the federal government created 14 million new classified documents in fiscal 2003 -- a 26 percent increase over the number stamped secret in 2002, and a 60 percent increase over 2001. Those numbers cover more than 40 agencies, but exclude the CIA. At the same time, the government is declassifying fewer documents, the report said.

"There are secrets that are necessary, but there are a heck of a lot of secrets that are being kept secret that the public would benefit from, with their disclosure," said Rick Blum, coalition coordinator for **OpenTheGovernment.org** and author of the report. Blum said the spike in secrecy is not just a Bush administration problem, but began in 2000 in Clinton's tenure. -- ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Thursday, August 26, 2004

Aumenta el número de documentos clasificados por gobierno

Washington, 26 ago (EFE).- Estados Unidos incrementó en los últimos años el número de documentos clasificados que almacena, a los cuales no tiene acceso el público a pesar de que los ciudadanos tienen derecho a esa información, según un estudio difundido hoy. La investigación, elaborada por una coalición privada de grupos de vigilancia de las actividades del Gobierno de EEUU denominada "Open The Government", señala que las autoridades federales crearon 14 millones de nuevos documentos confidenciales durante el año fiscal 2003, que finalizó el 30 de septiembre de ese año.

Eso representa un aumento de 60 por ciento en comparación con 2001.

Las estadísticas incluyen al menos a 40 instituciones del espionaje y seguridad, entre las que no figura la Agencia Central de Inteligencia (CIA).

La coalición indica que en esos años las autoridades de Washington han suprimido la confidencialidad en muy pocos casos.

En 2003 fueron desclasificadas 43 millones de páginas, lo que representa un millón menos en comparación con 2002, y una significativa bajada teniendo en cuenta que en 2001 se hicieron públicos cien millones de hojas con datos confidenciales.

Para Rick Blum, coordinador de la página de internet de la coalición **OpenTheGovernment.org**, existen muchos documentos que son necesarios mantener en secreto, mientras hay otros a los que se le debe levantar la confidencialidad en beneficio del público.

Blum manifestó que el mantener documentos clasificados es un problema que cobró fuerza durante la administración del presidente Bill Clinton (1993-2001).

William Leonard, director de la Oficina de Supervisión de la Información de Seguridad de los Archivos Nacionales, encargado del proceso de clasificación, indicó que el aumento de la cifra de documentos secreto es producto de un mayor trabajo en ese campo como consecuencia de los atentados del 11 de septiembre de 2001. EFE



Excerpt from "TheWeek" U.S. News & World Report, 9/6/04

Security: Keeping secrets

The feds have been in such a lather to keep things secret that for every dollar they spent last year to declassify old records, they blew \$120 to drape information under a veil of secrecy, says a new report. **OpenTheGovernment.org**, a coalition of 30-plus public interest groups, found that Washington spent \$6.5 billion last year to create 14 million new classified records and secure existing ones. "It's too easy to hide politically sensitive information behind this veil of national security," says coalition coordinator Rick Blum of OMB Watch, calling for officials to cut gratuitous coverups.

Example, he says: The Pentagon knew about the Abu Ghraib prison horrors long before the public did. If it had fessed up sooner, some of the abuses there might have been prevented.



Classified Adds

As Feds Classify More Info, Environment Could Be Affected

<http://www.gristmagazine.com/daily/daily082704.asp>

Since 9/11, the Bush administration has upped secrecy at a growing number of agencies, all in the name of fighting terrorism. Much of the information newly deemed sensitive has direct implications for the environment and public health. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will no longer make safety scorecards for nuclear facilities public. Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge has said he is considering removing hazardous-waste signs from trucks and trains, lest they tip off shadowy evildoers. A highway bill now in congressional committee would allow the government to withhold information "detrimental to the security of transportation, transportation facilities or infrastructure, or transportation employees," language so vague that Environmental Defense says it could be used to conceal hazardous-waste spills or the routes by which nuclear waste is transported. Though the recent 9/11 Commission report said too much information was classified already, the federal Information and Security Oversight Office says the number of classified government documents is only increasing.

- straight to the source: [Times Record News](#), Lance Gay, 25 Aug 2004
- straight to the source: [San Francisco Chronicle](#), Edward Epstein, 27 Aug 2004

The New York Times

"Government by, for and Secret From the People," September 5, 2004 By ERIC LICHTBLAU

THE capital's worst-kept secret is out: the federal government is becoming even more secretive.

This will come as no surprise to anyone who has filed a Freedom of Information Act request in the post-Sept. 11 age or tried to find out why his name was put on a "no fly" list, only to be told the information was too sensitive to be shared. But a new study seeks to quantify the government's interest in keeping material classified. It found that the administration protected some 14 million documents last year - a 60 percent increase since 2001.

The study, conducted by a coalition called openthegovernment.org, which favors greater access to government information, also found that it cost the federal government \$6.5 billion last year to secure its classified information, an increase of 39 percent since 2001.

Classifying and maintaining the nation's secrets amounted to \$459 a memo - or \$120 spent on maintaining secrets for each dollar spent to declassify and release them.

Requests for access to federal material under the Freedom of Information Act, meanwhile, have tripled in the last six years to more than 3.2 million in 2003, but federal resources devoted to handling those requests has remained largely constant.

The resulting backlog at some agencies has delayed responses by up to four years, the study found. At the same time, the Justice Department has made it easier for federal officials to refuse to release public records in the name of national security.

The federal government's penchant for secrecy is an old, bipartisan fact of life.

"This problem of overclassification and of secrecy has been a problem throughout the history of this country," Representative Dennis I. Kucinich, the Ohio Democrat and former presidential candidate, said at a recent Congressional hearing. "The White House has always kept the intelligence agency's budget secret, and deceptions in the defense budget date back to the Manhattan Project of World War II," he said.

In 1997, a commission led by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan spoke of a governmental "culture of secrecy," and urged greater openness.

But many historians say they believe secrecy has become even more pervasive since the Sept. 11 attacks.

The White House says the increase in classified documents is a reflection of changing times.

"One explanation is the increased use of e-mail, which has dramatically increased the number of items that have to be classified," said a White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"And the second thing is that we are in a wartime environment, where intelligence plays such an important role. There is not only more classified information collected, but more analysis to be done with it as a result, and these are sensitive things that have to be classified in an appropriate manner," the official said.

The administration has occasionally been admonished for going too far, as happened in June when a federal judge in California accused the Justice Department of using frivolous claims to justify its refusal to release basic information about how the federal government develops lists of travelers who are banned from flying.

Representative Christopher Shays, Republican of Connecticut, who was chairman of the hearing where Mr. Kucinich spoke, railed against the federal government's effort "to shield an immense and growing body of secrets using an incomprehensible, complex system of classifications."

"There are too many secrets," he said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/05/weekinreview/05eric.html?ex=1095667869&ei=1&en=5066b545817f069f>

DISTRIBUTED BY: COX NEWS by EUNICE MOSCOSO, Cox Washington Bureau

Published in: Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 8/27/04, p. A-7; *Milwaukee Journal & Sentinel*, 9/5/04, p. 10A; *Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia), 8/28/04; *Austin American-Statesman*. 8/17/04, p. A9

Washington --- Government secrecy is on the rise and costing taxpayers billions each year, says a new report by a coalition of nonprofit groups. The federal government spent \$6.5 billion last year keeping about 14 million new documents away from the public and securing previous secrets, says the study, released Thursday. By comparison, the government spent \$5.6 billion on classifying documents in 2002, including about 11 million new documents, and \$4.7 billion in 2001, including about 8 million new documents.

"Government secrecy is not only increasing, it's also making it harder for the public to get the information they need to make their families safe from an environmental hazard such as a toxic chemical that's in their drinking water system . . . or from a potential terrorist attack," according to Rick Blum, the coordinator of **OpenTheGovernment.org**, a coalition of over 30 nonprofit groups fighting what they call an increase in government secrecy. They include OMB Watch, a government watchdog; People for the American Way, a liberal advocacy group; the Federation of American Scientists; and the American Library Association.

Blum, the report's author, cited examples of government secrecy such as information about abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq that was known to the Pentagon months before it was made public, and efforts to classify sections of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on pre-war intelligence on Iraq.

He also said intelligence budgets in the government are classified, making it difficult to address questions of reform.

A report by the commission investigating the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks also finds secrecy is thwarting the government's ability to fight terrorists. Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) noted in an op-ed column in Thursday's New York Times that 9/11 commission Chairman Thomas Kean observed that "three-quarters of the classified material he reviewed for the commission should not have been classified in the first place."

Lott and Wyden criticized secrecy as excessive, saying it "has become so pervasive in the federal government that it's often unclear whether facts are classified for legitimate security reasons, or simply for the political protection of agencies and officials.

J. William Leonard, director of the government's Information Security Oversight Office, said classification was increasing at a rate that should concern the public, but that it was partly due to more documents being produced.

"Over the past couple of years, more and more agencies have gone to 24/7 operations," he said.

Justice Department officials have denied government secrecy is on the rise, saying the Bush White House is as open as previous administrations. For example, the number of responses for documents filed under the Freedom of Information Act equals what the Clinton administration released, they said.

Meanwhile, critics said government efforts to fight terrorism should not be used to keep the public in the dark.

"While it may be necessary to close access to some extremely sensitive data in response to terrorism, there is no evidence to suggest that the public will only be safe if it is kept ignorant of government activity," said Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, one of the groups in the coalition.

The report --- *Secrecy Report Card: Quantitative Indicators of Secrecy in the Federal Government* --- also found requests for government information had more than tripled during the past six years while federal resources to process the requests had not increased.

In 1998, about 869,000 requests were filed under the Freedom of Information Act. In 2003 the number jumped to more than 3 million.

In addition, the report said the government spent \$120 to make and keep documents secret for every \$1 it spent on declassification in 2003.

The study does not include the cost of classifying documents at the Central Intelligence Agency. That is classified.

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What Price Freedom? - Uncle Sam Hides More and More From Americans Aug 25, 2004

By LANCE GAY, Lance Gay at GayLSHNS.com. Distributed by Scripps Howard News Service, <http://www.shns.com>

Published in:

San Diego Herald-Tribune, Aug. 27 www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20040827/news_1n27secrecy.html

And *Capitol Hill Blue* www.capitolhillblue.com/artman/publish/article_5115.shtml

Three years after 9/11, the shroud of government secrecy is spreading as agencies strip information from their Web sites and withhold public information on the grounds it could help terrorists.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, for instance, announced on its Web site this month that it will no longer provide its public scorecard of security at U.S. power plants.

The agency has traditionally withheld details of security problems that federal inspectors find during routine inspections of power plants. But it used the scorecard every three months to provide the public a measurement of how power plants were doing. However, the panel decided even that limited information will no longer be published.

"In the post-9/11 environment, we continue to review all information," said commission spokesman Scott Burnell.

Having cable TV problems? Cell phone blacking out? Don't look to the Federal Communications Commission for reasons why.

It voted to withhold from the public any news of communication blackouts involving cable TV operators, satellite operators and telephone companies on the grounds that such information could provide "a road map for terrorists."

Releasing such information, the FCC said, would "seriously undermine national defense and public safety."

Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge says he is considering removing hazardous-material signs from trains and trucks because the placards "could help a criminal or a terrorist identify a target." In a notice published in the Aug. 16 Federal Register, Ridge asked the industry and other interested parties to comment on that plan and on other changes in security measures they would like to see.

Steven Aftergood, who monitors government secrecy for the American Federation of Scientists, said that taking hazmat signs from containers is a particularly silly idea.

"It's poorly conceived because it places at risk the lives of millions of Americans," said Aftergood. The hazardous-material signs are there to alert police and firemen to take precautions if the trucks or trains are in an accident.

Congress is considering even more sweeping transportation security measures.

As part of a highway bill now in a House-Senate conference committee, lawmakers are pushing Senate-passed language that would allow the government to withhold any information from the public that would be "detrimental to the security of transportation, transportation facilities or infrastructure, or transportation employees."

Karla Garrett Harshaw, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, says that the provision is so broadly drafted it could lead to the withholding of any information on contracts involving taxpayer-funded highway projects.

The **Environmental Defense** organization protests that the Department of Transportation could use the provision to withhold information on hazardous-waste spills on the basis that it might provide information to terrorists about system vulnerabilities, and to restrict information about rail and transportation routes for nuclear waste.

Moves to keep secret more government information come in the wake of the report by the 9/11 Commission, which found the government already had too much information that was over-classified. The Information and Security Oversight Office, an arm of the National Archives that oversees government classification programs, reported that the classification of government documents is increasing.

In its first two years, the Bush administration made 44.5 million decisions to classify material, about the same number made in the last four years of President Bill Clinton's term in office.

A coalition of Washington watchdog groups, led by the **Project on Government Oversight**, said in a new report that government over-classification costs taxpayers \$6.5 billion a year. Each document costs \$459 to secure and store.

"Openness both preserves democracy and saves money," said **Richard Blum**, author of the report, who contends secrecy is often used to hide government mistakes and embarrassing information voters are entitled to know.

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Wired, "All That Secrecy Is Expensive "

By [Noah Shachtman](#) 02:00 AM Aug. 27, 2004 PT www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,64731,00.html

The 9/11 Commission, leaders in Congress -- even the government's top secret-keeper -- all agree that Washington's penchant for keeping information under wraps has grown out of control. Now, a coalition of watchdog groups has documented just how much it's costing to keep all those records away from the public eye.

During the 2003 fiscal year, the federal government spent more than \$6.5 billion securing classified information, according to a new "Secrecy Report Card" from [OpenTheGovernment.org](#), a coalition of government watchdog and civil liberties groups. That's an increase of more than \$800 million from the previous year, according to the group, and a nearly \$2 billion jump since 2001. But it's only a best guess, really; the report card's accounting doesn't include a penny from the [Central Intelligence Agency](#), which keeps even its overall budget classified.

[Information Security Oversight Office](#).

The big problem with having too many secrets isn't that it's a waste of money; it's that it jeopardizes security, according to William Leonard. He's the director of the ISOO, and, essentially, the man in charge of the government's classification policies.

By keeping knowledgeable parties from sharing what they know, "secrecy guarantees a less-than-optimal outcome," Leonard told Wired News. "In analyzing intelligence, in developing military plans, there's a price that gets paid."

That's a view echoed by both the 9/11 Commission, in its [final report](#) (PDF), and several of the Defense Department's top current and former spies.

However, Leonard disputed some of the figures in the report card, which relied largely on his office for its data. For example, OpenTheGovernment claimed that "14 million new documents (were) stamped secret in fiscal year 2003." That's not quite right, Leonard said. That figure represents *all* of the decisions to keep information secret. Those include decisions on an original record -- a field report from Iraq, say -- as well as on a secondary document -- like a summary of Army intelligence -- that relies on that primary source.

But despite the discrepancy, Leonard said he agrees with the report card's "bottom-line conclusion, that secrecy is excessive, and, yeah, it's expensive." Original classification decisions were up about 8 percent last year, to 243,000, he noted.

That's far, far too many, according to Rep. Christopher Shays, who chairs the [national security panel](#) of the House of Representatives' Committee on Government Reform.

"I've read supposedly classified documents where page after page after page didn't tell me anything I didn't already know," he said in a telephone interview. When asked what percentage of government records were being wrongly kept from the public, Shays replied, "I tend to think 90 percent is not an exaggeration."

Compounding the problems is the fact that the government can't seem to let go of secrets that just aren't valuable any more. It took the CIA 20 years to declassify the fact that Augusto Pinochet, Chile's dictator, had a taste for distilled wine. Overall CIA budgets from decades back are still kept under wraps. And the pace of declassification has slowed since 9/11: 43 million pages in fiscal year 2003, as opposed to 100 million in 2001, according to the ISOO. Not surprisingly, the amount of money spent on releasing information has also slipped, from \$231 million in 2001 to \$54 million last year.

At the same time, the public thirst for government information seems to have risen. More than 3.2 million requests for federal documents were made under the Freedom of Information Act last year. That's about 1 million more than in 2001.

The cost of keeping secrets, according to OpenTheGovernment coordinator Rick Blum, comes largely from maintaining the patchwork of databases and networks that hold the government's sensitive information. Physical security of classified information has also been a major cost -- and a major concern. The repeated misplacement of secret disks at Los Alamos National Laboratory has shut down the nuclear weapons center for the last six weeks. That means a big chunk of the lab's annual budget of \$2.2 billion has been devoted to the security lapses, so far. Those figures weren't included in the OpenTheGovernment report card.

Today, nearly 4,000 people have the power to classify documents, Shays noted, including the members of the Agriculture and Health and Human Services departments, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency. He believes one way to trim the government's secrecy costs is to re-examine why so many people have that power.

"We're burying important documents with meaningless ones," he said. "So we're having a hard time finding valuable information." ###

San Francisco Chronicle, "White House takes secrecy to new levels, coalition reports"

Edward Epstein, Chronicle Washington Bureau, (August 27, 2004, p. A-7)

Washington -- The federal government under President Bush is classifying more information as secret, spending more to do it and falling further behind in dealing with the public's requests for information, a coalition of groups trying to combat secrecy in government reported Thursday.

"Secrecy has increased dramatically in recent years under the policies of the current administration," the 30-organization coalition called Openthegovernment.org said.

That tendency toward secrecy has increased since the 2001 terrorist attacks and was criticized in the Sept. 11 commission's report. It called for lifting the veil of secrecy surrounding the budget for the federal government's 15 intelligence agencies, which is widely estimated at \$40 billion, although the official figure is classified. It also said that secrecy between the intelligence agencies hampered the war against terrorism by "stovepiping" in formation within individual agencies rather than encouraging sharing across the intelligence community.

Openthegovernment's report said costs for classifying information and maintaining secrecy at federal agencies excluding the CIA hit \$6.5 billion in 2003, when 14 million documents were classified. Figures from the National Archives' information security oversight office and elsewhere show that the number of documents being classified has jumped 40 percent from 2001.

The figure for how much the CIA spends on classifying information isn't available. It's classified.

In contrast, the number of documents declassified in 2003 was 43.1 million, about a fifth of the number declassified in 1997, the report added. And for every \$120 the government spent maintaining its system of secrecy, it spent only \$1 on declassification.

The result is an increasing backlog of requests filed under the Freedom of Information Act. As an example, the coalition said requests for information made today from the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley (Los Angeles County) would probably be filled in 2008.

While saying the situation had worsened under the Bush administration, the coalition -- whose members include journalism organizations, government watchdog groups and the AFL-CIO -- said the trend toward more classification of information actually started in the last years of President Bill Clinton's administration.

The Sept. 11 commission's findings have fueled efforts to limit or roll back government secrecy. Its ideas on secrecy have received less attention than the headline-making proposals to create a sole national intelligence director, but they also could have a major impact on how the nation fights the war against terrorism. And like emerging opposition to the intelligence director proposal from those with vested interests in keeping their power, the anti-secrecy proposals also can be expected to attract critics who have long resisted efforts to lift the veil of stealth surrounding intelligence spending and operations.

"We can't have a public debate, because the American people aren't entitled by law to know how much money we're spending on all these agencies -- by law," commission member Bob Kerrey, a former Democratic senator from Nebraska, said as the panel's best-selling report was issued July 22.

He said the Sept. 11 investigation had learned that some 75 percent of what U.S. intelligence knew about al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden had been gleaned before 1996 but was held in "classified, compartmentalized sections."

"How in God's name are you supposed to imagine a threat if the facts are being withheld from you?" Kerrey asked.

Steven Aftergood, head of the American Federation of Scientists' project on government secrecy, says the proposal on declassifying information about the spy budget and how much each agency gets is a good place to start in piercing the veil of secrecy.

"I don't think the solution is to try to fix the whole system at a single blow," he told a House Government Reform subcommittee Tuesday. He said making budget information public would have a cascading effect on letting the public get information. However, he warned, Congress has defeated previous attempts to end the budget secrecy, and intelligence agencies have fought his group's court efforts to get data disclosed.

"There is no other category of information that has been as vigorously maintained as secret for so long, with so much energy, as intelligence budget information," Aftergood said. "If we can fix that, then the road becomes clear to fixing a whole range of other erroneously or improperly classified categories of information."

The House subcommittee chairman, Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., said declassifying more information while keeping genuine secrets classified would help the war against terrorists. "Fewer people classifying fewer secrets would better protect national security by focusing safeguards on truly sensitive information while allowing far wider dissemination of the facts and analysis the 9/11 commission says must be shared," Shays said.

E-mail Edward Epstein at eedstein@sfnchronicle.com.

Report: U.S. Government Secrecy Flourishing, Expensive

By [WILLIAM MATTHEWS](#)

www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=3144188&C=america

From suppressed CIA intelligence memos that cast doubt on the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to a classified report that kept the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal quiet for months, secrecy is flourishing in the U.S. government, according to a report by open government advocates.

The cost of keeping secrets is burgeoning, too, according to **OpenTheGovernment.org**, a coalition of more than 30 government watchdog organizations.

The federal government spent \$6.5 billion in 2003 to create 14 million new secret documents and to keep tens of millions of existing secrets secure, the group said in an Aug. 26 report. It costs \$459 to secure each secret document and its associated secret data, the group said.

That's a 60 percent increase in the number of new secrets compared to the number created in 2001, the report says. At the same time, government agencies received 3 million requests for information through the Freedom of Information Act, according to the report.

Some government officials concede that **OpenTheGovernment.org** has a point.

"It is no secret that the government classifies too much information," William Leonard told a House subcommittee Aug. 24. "Many senior officials will candidly acknowledge the problem of excessive classification, although oftentimes the observation is made with respect to the activities of agencies other than their own."

Leonard heads the Information Security Oversight Office, a branch of the National Archives. He was called before the House Government Reform subcommittee on national security, emerging threats and international relations to testify on secrecy and the problems it creates for information sharing.

Much of the penchant for secrecy is driven by the war on terrorism, but federal officials are overreacting, said **Lucy Dalglish**, director of the **Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press**, an **OpenTheGovernment.org** coalition member. While it is necessary to keep some extremely sensitive data secret, "there is no evidence to suggest that the public will only be safe if it is kept ignorant of government activity," she said. ###

Palladium-Item (Richmond, Indiana), 8/31/04, p. A6

"Government: Secrecy" (Editorial)

Too much is classified Some documents created by and for the government should be secret, but it should be as few as necessary for the security of the country.

A report released last week finds that documents have been marked classified simply to cover up mistakes or jokes. It finds there are unclear regulations about what should be considered classified. It reports that critical intelligence information was classified out of some reports before Congress saw it and that it might have made a difference in how some in Congress felt about the war in Iraq before it started.

President Bill Clinton's stated policy was that if there was any doubt about how a document should be classified, then it should be classified in the less restrictive way. President George W. Bush reversed that, instructing the government's 3,978 classifiers to err on the side of more restriction.

Wired.com reports that during the 2003 fiscal year, the federal government spent more than \$6.5 billion securing classified information, according to a new "Secrecy Report Card" from **OpentheGovernment.org**, a coalition of government watchdog and civil liberties groups. That's up more than \$800 million from 2002, the group says, and is a nearly \$2 billion jump since 2001. The head of the government's Information Security Oversight Office says the group's methodology is flawed but agrees that too many documents are classified and it's expensive to keep them.

The Secrecy Report Card's accounting doesn't include a the Central Intelligence Agency budget, which itself is classified.

Thomas Kean, the Republican chairman of the September 11 commission, has said most of the secret documents he reviewed for the commission were materials that involved hearsay or cited information that was publicly available elsewhere. They weren't really secrets.

The National Security Archive, a Washington, DC-based organization that has sought access to classified documents since 1985, published a collection of declassified documents in May called "CIA Stamped Secret on Santa Claus, Blacked Out Joke on North Pole Terrorism." The group says the CIA "classified and withheld from a Freedom of Information Act release a 25-year-old joke item in a weekly terrorism report about the terrorist threat to Santa Claus and the North Pole."

The Information Security Oversight Office, says more than 14 million documents were classified last year. Although the Pentagon, State Department and CIA generate the bulk of the classified documents, the oversight office said several agencies reported a dramatic increase in use of secrecy stamps last year including NASA, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the office of U.S. Trade Representative.

The rules about classification should be clarified and the government should return to a less-restrictive policy.

Classifying public information as secret is expensive and keeping it from government decision-makers even more so: poor decisions almost always result when good information is not available.

OUR POSITION

There is a need to protect sensitive information but the government is classifying too many documents now.