



Press Release

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Groups: Focus on Problem at Hand Needed in Post-WikiLeaks Assessments of Classified Information Procedures

Washington, DC, January 28, 2011—A variety of government openness, national security, and civil liberties organizations released a letter to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Jack Lew, to urge him to conduct the President's called-for review of the implementation of safeguarding procedures for classified information in the wake of the WikiLeaks disclosures in a manner that is targeted to the problem at hand and does not sweep so broadly as to infringe on protected constitutional rights and privacy interests of employees. The groups were prompted to write by troubling questions in a questionnaire OMB circulated as a guide to agencies in preparing an initial assessment of their classified information procedures.

OMB called for the assessments in a January 3 memo. Attached to the Memo is a long list of questions developed by the National Counterintelligence Executive and the Information Security Oversight Office. All agencies that handle classified information are required to assess weaknesses or gaps in information security with respect to the questions, and to formulate plans to resolve the issues. The assessments are to be completed by January 28.

According to Patrice McDermott, Director of OpenTheGovernment.org, "The majority of the questions focus appropriately on safeguarding policies and practices and oversight measures. Some of the questions, however, address personnel security and do not appear to be based on known standards or on publicly-reviewed rules. We are also concerned that such questions could distract agencies from focusing on practices to improve the security of classified information."

The groups point out that some of the questions suggest agencies monitor employees' pre- and post-employment activities or participation in on-line media data mining sites like WikiLeaks or Open Leaks, and require employees to report all contact with the media. Such practices and policies threaten employees' protected constitutional rights and privacy interests. Other questions suggest agencies take steps to monitor employee's relative happiness and grumpiness, which could become a basis for profiling of, and creating suspicious activity files on, employees who blow the whistle on waste, fraud and abuse.

"Undertaking this kind of assessment is a natural, and appropriate, reaction by the government," said Dr. McDermott. "We urge OMB and the classified national security information universe to focus on the task at hand, and not to craft policies that encourage agencies to unduly restrict free speech, or otherwise distract agencies from actually improving information security."

See the letter here: <http://www.openthegovernment.org/otg/CommentsOMBLEAKSMemo-Final.pdf>

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OpenTheGovernment.org is a coalition transcending party lines of more than 65 consumer and good government groups, librarians, environmentalists, labor, journalists, and others - focused on pushing back governmental secrecy and promoting openness.

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