

Freedom of Information—the CIA Complies

I read with interest the May 7 op-ed article by David Corn charging Robert Gates and the CIA with untimely delays in answering Freedom of Information Act requests ["Freedom of Information? Not From the CIA"]. I served as the director of the Freedom of Information Office at the National Security Council during the late 1970s and can speak to the issues he raised firsthand.

It is not as simple as Mr. Corn suggests that a government agency can locate, review, make declassification determinations and fully process a request in the 10 days required by the FOIA. In fact, many documents must be coordinated between among departments and agencies that might have originated information contained within the documents.

This is quite costly and time-consuming. Mr. Corn's article is a poison-pen letter suggesting a lack of sincerity by

Mr. Gates and his CIA. A more productive approach would be a call on Congress and the administration to commit the necessary manpower and resources to get the job done.

Congress passed the FOI law (while exempting itself at the same time) and placed an undue administrative burden on each department and agency in government without regard to what it would cost. Without these resources, Mr. Corn, like thousands of others, will have to go to the end of the line.

As one who is familiar with virtually every kind of request, it is an absurd notion that the CIA would, as Mr. Corn suggests, "program its computer" to scramble an index of previously released documents, thus rendering it unusable. His comments suggest some sinister plot within the CIA to derail any legitimate research. The Bob Gates I know and worked with would not tolerate

"capricious and spiteful" behavior of any employee in an area of policy to which he is so publicly committed. It also seems odd to me that the CIA would hide its files on the Hmong of the 1960s, if they existed, at the same time it has bared its breast in the post-Iran-contra era.

While Mr. Corn may have some legitimate concerns regarding delays of certain documents he has requested, he is diverting our attention from the true facts. Bob Gates has kept his word from the moment he was confirmed to initiate reforms at Langley. The most public demonstration of the new CIA is his personal handling of the release of the Oswald file. My guess is that this is not a publicity stunt but the first of many actions that will build confidence in an agency we all must be proud of.

GARY A. BARRON

W. Post 5/22/92 - Vienna

Letters to the editor
The Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

5/22/92

Gary A. Barron's letter (5/22/92), "Freedom of Information-the CIA Compl^{ies}," states the exact opposite of the CIA's record of gross and deliberate non-compliance with FOIA.

If as Barron say, David Corn has "to go to the end of the line," that means he is behind me with my 1971 ~~Requests~~ requests for the information on me or behind by 1975 requests for its information on the JFK assassination, both still without compliance after repeated and ignored appeals.

Barron denies ^{the CIA} it withhold "previously released" information. In my own and other FOIA lawsuits I have without contradiction attested to and proved the exact opposite.

^(CIA Director) Ron Gates, according to Barron, "would not tolerate ' capricious and spiteful' behavior," "has kept his word," of which "The most public demonstration of the new CIA is his personal handling of the release of the Oswald file ~~that~~ ...not a publicity stunt ..." at all.

Orwell could not have said it better!

What Gates gave the Senate committee a week ago was a few more than a hundred pages mostly the records of other agencies and not a bit of it new. All had been made public years ago. And it is a minuscule fraction of the records the CIA has and has not disclosed.

Coinciding in time with Gates' public-relations coup ^{and underscoring} in his false pretenses the FBI ^{Oswald and JFK assassination} sent me a ^{16-inch} stack ~~of information~~ of mostly CIA records it had referred to the agencies of origin for permission to disclose.

It would have cost Gates nothing - except his credibility - if he had included these thousands of pages ^{of records it approved the FBI sending} ~~it let the FBI send me~~ if he had added them to the few he gave the Senate. The volume I got ^{highlights} ~~underscores~~ the CIA's ^{continuing} intent to withhold. Some of them were processed for disclosure in 1976 and some just a few days before Gates testified.

On reading Gates' fine words I wrote him about the CIA's deliberate non-compliance,

extending to repeated lying and the dirtiest of dirty trick not to comply in February.

To date neither he nor anyone else at the CIA has responded in any way.

"The new CIA" of which Barron is so proud does not exist. It is the same CIA determined to withhold what can be embarrassing to it and to frustrate any use of the act to obtain information to which the law says we are all entitled .

Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg

Just three days ago
note to editor: I sent George Gardner a xerox of a statement to which I attested for the lawyer who handled my FOIA litigation and who can confirm what I say above, ^{VE} Jim Mesar, 373-

Harold Weisberg
7627 Old Receiver Rd.
Frederick, MD 21702

1921, for him to give to the Congressional committees ~~just two days ago.~~

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