

'Openness' at the CIA Part

It is perhaps understandable, as Gary A. Barron argues [letters, May 22], that the CIA fails to comply with the 10-day response requirement of the Freedom of Information Act. Few government agencies do. But that doesn't begin to indicate the scope of the CIA's freedom of information policy failures.

Of the CIA's 1991 workload of 3,730 pending FOIA requests, a full 50 percent were carried over into 1992 still awaiting action, according to a recent report to Congress. The oldest case still open was received in 1985. And the CIA's median FOIA response time has nearly doubled in the past year to 5.2 months.

Of the FOIA requests on which some action was taken, more than half were denied in full or in part. No doubt some of the denials are justifiable on national security grounds, though experience makes it plain that this is often not the case. The classification criteria adopted by the CIA, and unchanged in principle by the vaunted "openness" initiative, are unworthy of a democratic society.

Does anyone really believe, for example, that continued secrecy about the roughly \$30 billion annual intelligence budget, of which CIA gets perhaps \$3 billion to 4 billion, is needed to protect national security? Although Robert Gates appeared to endorse disclosure of this information at his confirmation hearing, to date his commitment on this point has not been fulfilled.

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