

Chairman Shays to Hold Third Hearing on Overclassification

(Washington, DC) -- Rep. Christopher Shays (CT-4), Chairman of the House Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, today announced he will convene an oversight hearing on policies governing handling of sensitive information.

Shays said recent reports of an ongoing program by the CIA and DIA to remove previously declassified documents from the National Archives are part of larger problem. "Secrets are kept to protect the national security," he said, "not to prevent embarrassment or protect Cold War bureaucrats from history's judgment. When many knowledgeable voices, including the 9/11 Commission, have called for greater openness and information sharing, our policies on creation and handling of sensitive information are moving in exactly the opposite direction. That threatens national security."

The hearing will be held March 14, 2 p.m. in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. Witnesses from federal agencies and private organizations will be invited to discuss current classification practices and recommendations to prevent overuse of secret classifications and other access restrictions on public information.

"We're spending a great deal of time and money hiding information from ourselves," Shays said. "Policies and procedures on classification, declassification, reclassification and designation of 'sensitive but unclassified' material have run amok. The Cold War intelligence machinery churns on, impervious to post-9/11 realities, and we're literally drowning in faux secrets," Shays added.

This is the Subcommittee's third hearing on overclassification. At a previous hearing, witnesses estimated that between twenty and fifty percent of material currently restricted should not be classified at all.