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February 17, 2006

The Honorable John D. Negroponte
Director of National Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Director  Negroponte:

Since I joined the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 2001 and became Vice Chairman in 2003, I increasingly have been disturbed by the amount of classified material that finds its way into the public realm. This problem has been with us for as long as governments have tried to keep secrets, but I have observed a marked acceleration of the practice in the last five years.

As you well know, the disclosure of classified information does serious damage to our intelligence programs and undermines our national security. On this point, I am in agreement with sentiment expressed by Porter Goss, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in his February 10, 2006, op-ed in the *New York Times*. He accurately describes many of the negative effects these revelations can have.

I am surprised and puzzled, however, that Director Goss chose to lay the blame for this damage on what he describes as misguided whistleblowers. Clearly "leaks" and damaging revelations of intelligence sources and methods are generated primarily by Executive Branch officials pushing a particular policy, and not by the rank-and-file employees of the intelligence agencies.

For conformation we need look no further than press reports from the past few days. On February 9th, the *National Journal* reported that I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby told a grand jury that he was "authorized" by Vice President Cheney and other White House superiors to disclose classified information from a National Intelligence Estimate to the press to defend the Administration's use of pre-war intelligence in making the case to go to war in Iraq.

This blatant abuse of intelligence information for political purposes is inexcusable, but all too common. Throughout the period leading up to the Iraq war the Administration selectively declassified or leaked information related to Iraq's acquisition of aluminum tubes, the alleged purchase uranium, the non-existent operational connection between Iraq and al Qaeda, and numerous other issues.

The leaks associated with the Iraq war were a continuation of a pattern of using classified material for political gain that began after the September 11 attacks. In his 2002 book, Bush at War, Bob Woodward described almost unfettered access to classified material of the most sensitive nature. According to his account he was provided information related to sources and methods, extremely sensitive covert actions, and foreign intelligence liaison relationships. It is no wonder that, as Director Goss wrote, "because of the number of recent news reports discussing our relationships with other intelligence services, some of these critical partners have even informed the C.I.A. that they are reconsidering their participation in some of our most important antiterrorism ventures."

I wrote both former Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) George Tenet and Acting DCI John McLaughlin seeking to determine what steps were being taken to address the appalling disclosures contained in Bush at War. The only response I received was to indicate that the leaks had been authorized by the Administration. The CIA has still not responded to a follow-up letter I sent a year and a half ago on September 1, 2004, trying to pin down which officials were authorized to meet with Mr. Woodward and by whom, and what intelligence information was conveyed during these authorized exchanges.

Unfortunately, this pattern continues. On February 9th, the President described the disruption of a terrorist plot in 2002. As Director Goss notes “revelations of intelligence successes or failures, whether accurate or not, can aid Al Qaeda and its affiliates in many ways.” Why then did the President and the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, describe in great detail the information about this plot contained in a highly classified October 2004 CIA document?

And, of course, we have the case of the December leak related to an NSA warrantless surveillance program. Rather than offering no comment on the press stories, as is normally done when classified information is leaked, the President chose to selectively declassify aspects of the program that would allow for a public relations campaign to score political points. The President has for the past two months used previously classified information about this program to bolster his political position while simultaneously denying the Congress access to information needed to fully understand and evaluate the program.

To my dismay, your Principal Deputy, General Michael Hayden, has been a key participant in this White House public relations strategy intended to deflect criticism of the NSA program. In his numerous press and television appearances over the past two months, General Hayden has become a highly-visible extension of the White House’s aggressive media campaign. These appearances go well beyond any technical background information that the intelligence community could reasonably be expected to provide. I am concerned that General Hayden’s participation has undermined the mandatory principle that intelligence officials be independent and free from political influence.

Given the Administration’s continuing abuse of intelligence information for political purposes, its criticism of leaks is extraordinarily hypocritical. Preventing damage to intelligence sources and methods from media leaks will not be possible until the highest levels of the Administration cease to disclose classified information on a selective basis for political purposes. The President and other senior members of the Administration must set the example for others to follow.

As the leader of the brave and dedicated men and women of the intelligence community, I urge you to carry this message to the White House. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John".

John D. Rockefeller IV
Vice Chairman

A handwritten note in black ink that says "Thank you, John." with a period at the end.