

Washington Insider

New U.S. House of Representatives Oral History Web Site Launched

The Clerk's Office of History and Preservation recently announced the launch of the official U.S. House of Representatives' Oral History Web site, <http://oralhistory.clerk.house.gov/>. Interviews include a range of House staff and officers, as well as children of members of Congress. In addition to interview transcripts in html and PDF formats, the site features video and audio clips, brief interviewee biographies, artifacts, images, and educational resources for teachers.

Task Force Report on "Sensitive But Unclassified Information" Released

On December 15, the Presidential Interagency Task Force on Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) released a report recommending a single, standardized framework for marking, safeguarding, and disseminating sensitive but unclassified (SBU) information across the federal government. SBU information refers collectively to the various designations for documents and information that are sufficiently sensitive to warrant some level of protection but that do not meet the standards for classification. The report proposes 40 actions intended to mitigate current inconsistencies among SBU information policies in federal agencies by simplifying and consolidating procedures—intended to enhance standardization, information sharing, government transparency, and protection of information only where there is a compelling requirement to do so. The recommendations also seek to balance the imperatives of protecting legitimate security, law enforcement, privacy, and civil liberties interests. The task force was directed to review the ongoing efforts of the CUI Council, established by a 2008 Presidential Memorandum, and its ongoing efforts to establish a CUI Framework for terrorism-related information. One significant recommendation in the report would expand the scope of the CUI Framework to the designation, marking, safeguarding, and dissemination of all SBU information. There are more than 100 different SBU markings and handling procedures currently in use across the federal government. The report recommends that all SBU markings be replaced with one, simplified set of markings—"CUI"—that will be standardized under the CUI Framework. President Obama initiated the review with a Presidential Memorandum. The task force, which involved senior representatives from 12 federal agencies, met with representatives both within and outside the information sharing environment; state, local and tribal partners; privacy and open government organizations; and members of Congress.

Archivist of the U.S. Creates Holdings Protection Program

In one of his first major acts since assuming the position, archivist of the United States David Ferriero recently announced the creation of the NARA Holdings Protection Program and the

appointment of a team to staff the initiative. Eric Peterson was appointed as the team leader. Most recently, Peterson was the special security officer for the Naval Information Operations Command, where he was responsible for loss prevention and classified programs. He will lead a seven-member team composed of archives specialists, loss prevention specialists, and a trainer. Over the past few years, NARA has been embarrassed by highly publicized incidents of theft of its holdings. The most famous was the theft of documents from the National Archives by President Clinton's former national security advisor Samuel R. Berger. Berger eventually pled guilty to one misdemeanor count of Unauthorized Removal and Retention of Classified Documents. In March 2009, NARA discovered an external hard drive containing copies of Clinton Administration Executive Office of the President data was missing from a NARA processing room. The program will serve as a nationwide resource developing and administering policies to enhance holdings protection of original records, regardless of their format to reduce the loss of and aid in the recovery of holdings while ensuring ready access for research by all stakeholders. The team will work with individual offices within the National Archives, the regional archives and records centers, and the presidential libraries.

White House Announces Increased Emphasis on Program Evaluations

White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) director Peter Orszag announced that "rigorous, independent program evaluations can be a key resource in determining whether government programs are achieving their intended outcomes as well as possible and at the lowest possible cost." Therefore, as part of the FY 2011 budget process OMB will launch a number of government-wide efforts to strengthen program evaluations. First, OMB will ask agencies to make information about already existing evaluations available online. Second, a new inter-agency working group will promote stronger evaluations across the government. The centerpiece of the initiative are new voluntary evaluations in agencies that will show "how their Fiscal Year 2011 funding priorities are evidence-based or otherwise subject to rigorous evaluation; assess their own capacity to support evaluation and suggest pathways for strengthening that capacity; propose new evaluations that could improve government programs in the future; and identify impediments to rigorous program evaluation in their statutes or regulations." OMB is interested in impact evaluations, or evaluations aimed at determining the causal effects of programs. In proposing new spending or significant expansion of existing spending, OMB asks agencies to "provide credible evidence of a program's effectiveness." OMB also requires agencies to assess their capacity to "conduct rigorous, independent evaluations."

From the COSSA's Washington Update (<http://www.cossa.org/communication/update.shtml>) and the National Coalition for History's Washington Update (<http://historycoalition.org/archives/>).