A Vision for a Classification and Declassification System of the Future:

ONE EXAMPLE *of a* FUNCTIONING SECURITY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

As an agency official creates an electronic record, an automated tool assists the official by reviewing the record's content, comparing it to previously unclassified, classified, and declassified records, and suggests an appropriate classification level, if any, and corresponding markings. When the official disagrees with the system's prompt, the record is referred to information security personnel and original classification authorities for deliberation. The results of this classification review are ingested into the system, which immediately identifies all existing and future appearances of comparable information and marks it accordingly.

The system imprints all records with standardized metadata, which chronicle the record's authorship, sources, and access controls, as well as its reasons for classification and its declassification instructions. The digital signatures of credentialed personnel who access the record are captured in its transaction history. Security managers audit record access histories to protect against insider threats and ensure appropriate access. Agency records officers and historians identify and digitally annotate historically significant file series, which are used to compose classified and unclassified agency histories.

Metadata facilitate the rapid retrieval of information to fulfill mission requirements, assist in preemptive disclosures, and honor public requests. If a record is not already declassified after discretionary review, its access restrictions and classification automatically self-extinguish as it reaches its declassification date. Records deemed historically valuable but exempt from automatic declassification are prioritized in eventual systematic declassification reviews.

To prevent referral backlogs and encourage a historical perspective, all exempted records are reviewed for declassification at the National Declassification Center (NDC). Agency reviewers at the NDC conduct systematic and mandatory declassification reviews and input the results to expand the system's contextual knowledge. Pass-fail reviews of classified records are a thing of the past; the sophistication and automation of the system allows all declassification reviews to be conducted at the redaction level. Records containing Formerly Restricted Data information are eligible for declassification review at the NDC after 25 years. At the request of respective Congressional committees, classified House and Senate records are also systematically processed for declassification at the NDC.

Information flows readily and effectively between policymakers, users, records managers, and historians and, through efficient and accurate declassification, to the public. Technology and procedural reforms make classification consistent and declassification timely. Advanced information retrieval and analysis tools are used to address over-classification in a comprehensive, real-time manner, and changes in classification precedent are immediately and comprehensively implemented. The centralization of government work processes and the renewed emphasis on openness increase the public's confidence in the security classification system and reinforce the fact that national security information belongs to the American people.