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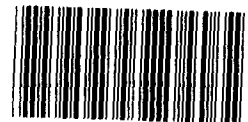
STATEMENT OF
MILTON J. SOCOLAR
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

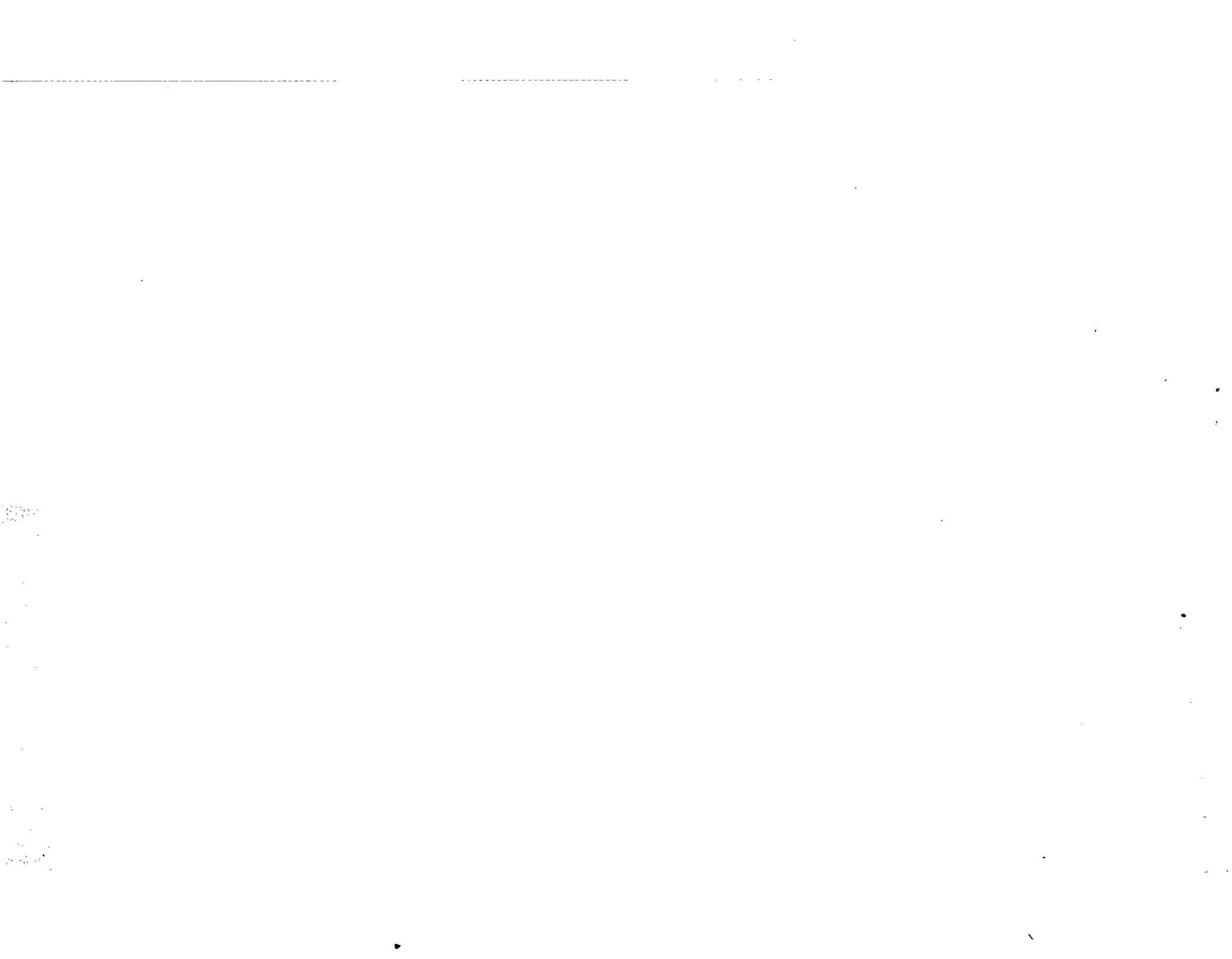
ON

POLITICAL RATING SYSTEMS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE



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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our report on, Compiling Numerical Ratings for Members of Congress by the Department of Defense which was issued on June 20, 1983, (GAO/MASAD-83-14). This report followed your request of July 26, 1982, that we document the extent to which Navy political rating files were used within the Department of Defense (DOD); that we identify those individuals who were involved in compiling the files; and that we determine the specific purpose of the rating files.

In summary, we reported that:

--The Navy Office of Legislative Affairs compiled numerical ratings based on selected votes for each Member of Congress. We did not find any evidence that such a rating system was in use in other DOD agencies or within the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

--The ratings for 56 Members of the Congress, who were also members of the Congressional Military Reform Caucus, were distributed within the Department of the Navy to senior officials. The caucus is a bipartisan group whose purpose is to effect changes in our national defense policy.

--The ratings were used as a measure of Members of Congress attitudes on issues and programs considered important to the Navy. According to Navy officials, the ratings were intended for internal Navy use only.

--Records pertaining to the ratings were destroyed. Shortly after it was disclosed publicly in the Congressional Record of July 21, 1982, that the Navy was rating Members of Congress, senior Navy officials directed that use of the rating be discontinued and supporting materials destroyed.

The Navy Office of Legislative Affairs began developing numerical ratings on its own initiative in early 1982, based on selected votes for each Member of Congress. We did not find any evidence that the Office of Legislative Affairs received any instructions or orders from higher authority within the Department of the Navy or DOD to develop the system.

Captain Brent Baker, Director of Plans and Operations in the Navy's Office of Legislative Affairs did the rating of all Members of Congress. These ratings were based on four Senate roll-call votes with a May 1982 update adding three more, and

nine House roll-call votes. The votes selected were generally from the fiscal year 1981 supplemental and 1982 DOD Authorizations and Appropriations Legislation. The Senate update covered votes on 1983 DOD Authorization measures.

Captain Baker, in choosing votes to analyze, made a personal judgement as to which issues were significant in terms of dollars or potential impact on operations of the Navy or DOD. Captain Baker used the commercially available computerized data base called LEGI-SLATE to calculate and facilitate rapid completion of the ratings. LEGI-SLATE is an automated congressional bill, vote, and committee tracking system that gives subscribers quick access to legislative actions, recorded votes, and committee schedules. LEGI-SLATE itself has several rating options which allow subscribers to rate "instantly" how one or all Members of Congress voted on a specific issue.

The ratings for Senate and House members of the Congressional Military Reform Caucus were distributed within the Department of the Navy in a June 18, 1982, memorandum signed by Rear Admiral Knoizen, then Chief of the Office of Legislative Affairs. The memorandum was addressed to the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Copies were sent to 25 senior

Navy officials. According to Navy officials, no other distribution was made except for a copy provided upon request to a staff member of Senator Ted Stevens. Senator Stevens had the memorandum reprinted in the Congressional Record of July 21, 1982.

Admiral Knoizen's memorandum was the third and final in a series of memorandums relating to the Military Reform Caucus. Two earlier memorandums, one dated August 19, the other December 2, 1981, were addressed to both the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations. They included the National Security Index--prepared by the American Security Council, a special interest group. The two earlier memorandums were distributed within the Department of the Navy on a more limited basis than the Admiral's memorandum of June 18, 1982.

The Navy at one time used the National Security Index as a measure of a Member's attitudes on defense policy. But because this index on security and foreign affairs issues did not show the basis for the congressional votes selected for analysis and since ratings were not available for freshman members; the Navy discontinued its use in favor of the rating system at issue. These shortcomings in the National Security Index led Navy officials to develop a rating index which did not have these limitations. As explained to us, the ratings

were for internal use only by senior Navy officials and not intended for public distribution.

The Secretary of the Navy, Mr. John Lehman, after learning of Congressional concerns ordered that the practice of developing ratings on Members of Congress based on their voting records be discontinued. Rear Admiral Bruce Newell, Chief of the Navy's Office of Legislative Affairs, then instructed his staff on July 23, 1982, to spend no further funds on the ratings and to destroy any related materials.

Navy officials said that the following records were destroyed on July 23, 1982:

--The printout of Navy index ranking for all Members of Congress.

--The word processor disc on which the ratings were maintained.

--Working papers relating to the roll-call votes selected for ratings.

--Some copies of the above mentioned June 18, 1982, memorandum on the Military Reform Caucus.

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In closing, I would note that preparation of the ratings was made easier by the automated legislative tracking system--LEGI-SLATE. The Navy rating system may not have been developed if the process were time-consuming rather than being an almost instantaneous by-product of the normal automated process of tracking legislation through the Congress. The use of LEGI-SLATE is widespread within federal agencies, and the potential for rating similar to the Navy's should therefore be recognized.

While it is understandable that executive branch agencies will seek to ascertain which Members of Congress are friendly to their interests and which are opposed, there may be a point beyond which such activity gives rise to cause for concern. Clearly, agency officials often have a legitimate need to know the background and legislative disposition of the members with whom they deal. There is for consideration, though, whether the line between the appropriate and inappropriate is overstepped, when agency officials compile detailed rating indexes subject to public disclosure and possible use for political purpose outside the realm of agency need. Computerization allows for easy and widespread development of rating indexes. With this relative ease together with the inevitability of public disclosure once indexes are compiled,

the Congress may wish to begin considering whether a statutory definition of acceptable legislative liaison practice is in order.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. We will be glad to respond to any questions you have.

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