

Bush orders millions of documents to be kept secret

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- President George W. Bush has issued an executive order that will delay the release of millions of historical documents for more than three years and make it easier to reclassify information considered damaging to national security.

Bush signed the 25-page order three weeks before the government's April 17 deadline for declassifying millions of documents 25 years or older. Amending a less restrictive order signed by former president Bill Clinton, Bush's action gives agencies until 2006 to release the documents.

The documents in question encompass a wide range of national security decision-making, from military records to diplomatic documents.

In addition, the order makes it easier for the government to reclassify sensitive information if an agency determines it is in the interest of national security. The reclassification provision applies to documents between 10 and 25 years old, which would include periods in which Bush's father, George Bush, served as president and vice-president, the White House said.

The order said that information provided in confidence by a foreign government is presumed classified. Under the Clinton order, this type of information was kept classified or declassified on a case-by-case basis.