THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. At the stroke of midnight tonight, a vital intelligence law that is helping protect our nation will expire. Congress had the power to prevent this from happening, but chose not to.

The Senate passed a good bill that would have given our intelligence professionals the tools they need to keep us safe. But leaders in the House of Representatives blocked a House vote on the Senate bill, and then left on a 10-day recess.

Some congressional leaders claim that this will not affect our security. They are wrong. Because Congress failed to act, it will be harder for our government to keep you safe from terrorist attack. At midnight, the Attorney General and the Director of National Intelligence will be stripped of their power to authorize new surveillance against terrorist threats abroad. This means that as terrorists change their tactics to avoid our surveillance, we may not have the tools we need to continue tracking them -- and we may lose a vital lead that could prevent an attack on America.

In addition, Congress has put intelligence activities at risk even when the terrorists don't change tactics. By failing to act, Congress has created a question about whether private sector companies who assist in our efforts to defend you from the terrorists could be sued for doing the right thing. Now, these companies will be increasingly reluctant to provide this vital cooperation, because of their uncertainty about the law and fear of being sued by class-action trial lawyers.

For six months, I urged Congress to take action to ensure this dangerous situation did not come to pass. I even signed a two-week extension of the existing law, because members of Congress said they would use that time to work out their differences. The Senate used this time productively -- and passed a good bill with a strong, bipartisan super-majority of 68 votes. Republicans and Democrats came together on legislation to ensure that we could effectively monitor those seeking to harm our people. And they voted to provide fair and just liability protection for companies that assisted in efforts to protect America after the attacks of 9/11.

The Senate sent this bill to the House for its approval. It was clear that if given a vote, the bill would have passed the House with a bipartisan majority. I made every effort to work with the House to secure passage of this law. I even offered to delay my trip to Africa if we could come together and enact a good bill. But House leaders refused to let the bill come to a vote. Instead, the House held partisan votes that do nothing to keep our country safer. House leaders...
chose politics over protecting the country -- and our country is at greater risk as a result.

House leaders have no excuse for this failure. They knew all along that this deadline was approaching, because they set it themselves. My administration will take every step within our power to minimize the damage caused by the House's irresponsible behavior. Yet it is still urgent that Congress act. The Senate has shown the way by approving a good, bipartisan bill. The House must pass that bill as soon as they return to Washington from their latest recess.

At this moment, somewhere in the world, terrorists are planning a new attack on America. And Congress has no higher responsibility than ensuring we have the tools to stop them.

Thank you for listening.

END

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