






For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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President Bush Discusses FISA

South Lawn

9:20 A.M. EST

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THE PRESIDENT: Last month House leaders declared that they needed 21 additional days to pass legislation giving our intelligence professionals the tools they need to protect America. That deadline passed last Saturday without any action from the House.

This week House leaders are finally bringing legislation to the floor. Unfortunately, instead of holding a vote on the good bipartisan bill that passed the United States Senate, they introduced a partisan bill that would undermine America's security. This bill is unwise. The House leaders know that the Senate will not pass it. And even if the Senate did pass it, they know I will veto it.

Yesterday the Attorney General and the Director of National Intelligence sent a leader [sic] to the Speaker explaining why the bill is dangerous to our national security. They cited a number of serious flaws in the bill, including the following:

First, the House bill could reopen dangerous intelligence gaps by putting in place a cumbersome court approval process that would make it harder to collect intelligence on foreign terrorists. This is an approach that Congress explicitly rejected last August when bipartisan majorities in both houses passed the Protect America Act. And it is an approach the Senate rejected last month when it passed a new -- new legislation to extend and strengthen the Protect America Act by an overwhelming vote of 68 to 29.



Now House leaders are proposing to undermine this consensus. Their partisan legislation would extend protections we enjoy as Americans to foreign terrorists overseas. It would cause us to lose vital intelligence on terrorist threats, and it is a risk that our country cannot afford to take.

Second, the House bill fails to provide liability protection to companies believed to have assisted in protecting our nation after the 9/11 attacks. Instead, the House bill would make matters even worse by allowing litigation to continue for years. In fact, House leaders simply adopted the position that class action trial lawyers are taking in the multi-billion-dollar lawsuits they have filed. This litigation would undermine the private sector's willingness to cooperate with the intelligence community, cooperation that is absolutely essential to protecting our country from harm. This litigation would require the disclosure of state secrets that could lead to the public release of highly classified information that our enemies could use against us. And this litigation would be unfair, because any companies that assisted us after 9/11 were assured by our government that their cooperation was legal and necessary.

Companies that may have helped us save lives should be thanked for their patriotic service, not subjected to billion-dollar lawsuits that will make them less willing to help in the future. The House bill may be good for class action trial lawyers, but it would be terrible for the United States.

Third, the House bill would establish yet another commission to examine past intelligence activities. This would be a redundant and partisan exercise that would waste our intelligence officials' time and taxpayers' money.

The bipartisan House and Senate intelligence and judiciary committees have already held numerous oversight

hearings on the government's intelligence activities. It seems that House leaders are more interested in investigating our intelligence professionals than in giving them the tools they need to protect us. Congress should stop playing politics with the past and focus on helping us prevent terrorist attacks in the future.

Members of the House should not be deceived into thinking that voting for this unacceptable legislation would somehow move the process along. Voting for this bill does not move the process along. Instead, voting for this bill would make our country less safe because it would move us further away from passing the good bipartisan Senate bill that is needed to protect America.

The American people understand the stakes in this struggle. They want their children to be safe from terror. Congress has done little in the three weeks since the last recess, and they should not leave for their Easter recess without getting the Senate bill to my desk.

Thank you.

END 9:25 A.M. EDT

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