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Senate approves intelligence bill

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The Senate yesterday overwhelmingly passed legislation creating a new national intelligence framework, ending debate over how to transform the nation's spy network to prevent terrorist attacks and sending the bill to President Bush for his signature.

Although voting to end weeks of wrangling over the Bush-backed bill, several senators -- including some of the 89 who voted for it -- voiced reservations about it.

Sen. Robert C. Byrd, West Virginia Democrat, said the bill failed to address some House Republicans' concerns about immigration.

"I am for intelligence reform and many things in this bill, but we cannot expect reforms without closing these gaps in illegal immigration," Mr. Byrd said. He and Sen. James M. Inhofe, Oklahoma Republican, cast the only votes against the bill.

The bill would create the post of a national intelligence director. Speculation yesterday about who might fill the post included the names of CIA Director Porter J. Goss; Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden, director of the National Security Agency; September 11 commission Chairman Thomas H. Kean; and several members of Congress, including Democratic Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

The bill, long tied up by disagreements between the House and Senate, substantially incorporates the recommendations of the commission that investigated the 2001 terrorist hijackings that killed about 3,000 people.

Supporters said the overhaul of U.S. intelligence agencies was long overdue.

"We are rebuilding a structure that was designed for a different enemy at a different time, a structure that was designed for the Cold War and has not proved agile enough to deal with the threats of the 21st century," said Sen. Susan Collins, Maine Republican and key sponsor

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of the bill.

"The world has changed," said Mr. Lieberman, adding that terrorists "make no distinction between soldiers and civilians, between foreign and domestic locations when they attack us."

But Mr. Inhofe echoed Mr. Byrd's criticism that the measure was a "rush to judgment."

"I also think this needs more time," Mr. Inhofe said, adding that "without exception every time we've rushed to do something and then accepted promises that we would get it fixed in three weeks or next year, it never seems to happen."

Mr. Inhofe and Mr. Byrd expressed support for immigration-related provisions originally included in the House version of the bill, but removed at the insistence of Senate Republicans and the Bush administration.

Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., Wisconsin Republican, was the chief proponent of including a measure to deny driver's licenses to illegal immigrants, saying the 19 foreign terrorists who perpetrated the September 11 attacks had 63 valid state driver's licenses, which they used to board the planes they hijacked.

"President Bush had an opportunity to support Congressman Sensenbrenner by protecting his provisions for stronger border security. Instead, this bill is simply a hodgepodge of border security promises that the administration has no intention of funding," said Mr. Byrd, who had insisted on three hours of debate and a roll call on the bill, thwarting Senate supporters' plans to pass the bill by voice vote.

Mr. Byrd also objected to the removal of a provision to prevent the release of terror suspects who seek political asylum.

Sens. Carl Levin, Michigan Democrat, and Ted Stevens, Alaska Republican, both of whom voted for the bill, suggested that the legislation gives too much power to the national intelligence director.

"No one else has the authority to contain this individual. This person will exercise power far beyond anything I have ever seen even in wartime," Mr. Stevens said.

Mr. Levin suggested that the bill did not adequately address the problem of "nonobjective intelligence," including appraisals used to justify the invasion of Iraq.

"The scope and the seriousness of the problem of manipulated intelligence cannot be overstated," Mr. Levin said.

Throughout the debate, senators praised the family members of the September 11 attack victims. Some lawmakers said there was unanimous support for the bill from the families, but some family members said the measure was inadequate without the immigration provisions.

"The 9/11 commission says it in black and white on Page 390 that the federal government should set standards for driver's licenses," said Peter Gadiel, a member of 9/11 Families for a Secure America, a volunteer lobbying organization consisting of more than 300 family members.

A provision in the bill calls for federal security standards for licenses to thwart counterfeiters, but Mr. Sensenbrenner and Rep. Tom Tancredo, Colorado Republican, argued that the hijackers' ability to use false documents to obtain legal driver's licenses proves the need for a stricter burden of proof.

Mr. Gadiel, 56 and Joan Molinaro, 59 -- whose firefighter son died in the collapse of New York's World Trade Center -- repeatedly criticized the legislation this week.

"It is not an accident they could get all of this done and then when it comes time to

make it law, they chose to ignore broader security," Mrs. Molinaro said.

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