

# **W** Sept. 11 Panel's Chief Wants Help From Bush

By PHILIP SHENON

Published: October 15, 2004

ASHINGTON, Oct. 14 - The chairman of the independent Sept. 11 commission called on President Bush on Thursday to become personally involved in pressuring Congress to overhaul the nation's intelligence community, warning that the legislation recommended by the panel might die in Congress without Mr. Bush's intervention before the election next month.

"I'm very worried," said the chairman, Thomas H. Kean, a former Republican governor of New Jersey. "I think it's a 50-50 situation now. We've come a long way; we're right up to the finish line. But we have some powerful adversaries."

"I would certainly urge the president to do everything in his power to get a final bill to his desk before the election," Mr. Kean said in a telephone interview, a week after the House and Senate produced sharply different versions of a bill to enact the commission's major recommendations, including creation of the job of national intelligence director.

"I would hope that he would urge his friends in Congress to act," Mr. Kean said of the president. "I will reach out to the White House to urge them to do everything they can."

The Republican author of the Senate bill, Senator Susan Collins of Maine, also called for Mr. Bush to become involved in the Congressional negotiations, even if that meant taking time off the campaign trail. "It would be very helpful for the president to be involved, even though I realize this is an extraordinarily busy period for him," Ms. Collins said.

It would be difficult for the White House to ignore requests from Mr. Kean and Ms. Collins, especially since they come in the final days of a campaign in which Mr. Bush is seeking re-election in part on his record in reorganizing the government to prevent terrorist attacks. Mr. Bush has endorsed the commission's major recommendations, including the new intelligence director.

A White House spokeswoman, Erin Healy, did not answer directly when asked if Mr. Bush would consider becoming personally involved in the negotiations. "My response would be that we continue to work with the House and Senate leaders," Ms. Healy said. "The president is very committed to intelligence reform."

Mr. Kean also called on a newly created House-Senate conference committee to abandon law-enforcement and immigration provisions that were placed in the House version by the Republicans and were not among the commission's recommendations. The

provisions, which would strengthen the government's surveillance and deportation powers, have been opposed by Democrats in Congress and civil liberties groups.

"We're not for or against them, because we did not consider them," Mr. Kean said of the provisions. "But if they are controversial, they can impede the progress of the bill. We'd like to see them moved to a separate piece of legislation."

The conference committee is expected to begin work in earnest next week to draw up a compromise bill.

Mr. Kean, who is the president of Drew University in Madison, N.J., said he and other members of the commission hoped that a compromise bill would resemble the bipartisan Senate measure passed last week by a vote of 96 to 2. It granted more budget and personnel authority to the national intelligence director than did its House counterpart.

"The Senate bill is obviously a good bill," Mr. Kean said. "The House bill has some good things in it, but it doesn't have a strong national intelligence director. We think the national intelligence director has got to have full budget and personnel authority to do the job. And that is much clearer in the Senate bill than in the House bill."

Mr. Kean said he and other members of the commission were disappointed that Congress had not yet accepted another of their panel's central recommendations, an overhaul of the way the Senate and House conduct intelligence oversight. Last week the Senate voted down a proposal that would have provided the Senate Intelligence Committee with the appropriation powers needed to distribute the billions of dollars spent each year by intelligence agencies, a proposal made by the commission to strengthen the power of the Intelligence Committee. The House has not voted on any substantive reform of its intelligence oversight.

The White House and Congress are also under pressure from family members of victims of the Sept. 11 attacks, who have fanned out to demand passage of a bill to enact the findings of the Sept. 11 commission.

Family members said that they had a disappointing meeting on Thursday with Alberto R. Gonzales, Mr. Bush's White House counsel, and that Mr. Gonzales had suggested there might be no final bill before the election.

"We're getting very mixed signals from the White House," said Beverly Eckert, who attended the White House meeting; her husband died in the World Trade Center.

Ms. Healy, the White House spokeswoman, disputed the description of the meeting, saying Mr. Gonzales had "reiterated the president's position that he wants to see this legislation adopted as soon as possible."

A spokesman for Speaker J. Dennis Hastert of Illinois said that while House Republicans were open to negotiations with the Senate over a final bill, Mr. Hastert continued to

believe that the House version passed last week "captured the spirit of the recommendations" of the Sept. 11 commission.

The spokesman, John Feehery, said that while some Democrats and civil liberties groups had criticized law-enforcement provisions inserted into the House bill, all of the provisions would "make the country safer."

"We probably need some further definition of what's considered controversial and not controversial," Mr. Feehery said.