



# White House Urges Quick Passage of 9/11 Bill

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 19 - The White House is calling on Congress to follow the recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission in creating the job of national intelligence director. In a letter made public on Tuesday, the White House urged lawmakers to move quickly to pass a bill that provides the intelligence director with "full budget authority" and "explicit authority" to transfer billions of dollars among spy agencies.

The letter endorsed provisions of a bipartisan Senate bill passed this month and endorsed by the leaders of the Sept. 11 commission. The bill would provide broad powers to a national intelligence director who would oversee the operations of most of the government's 15 intelligence agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency.

A rival Republican-written House bill would place significant limits on the budget and personnel authority of the cabinet-level intelligence director's job. It has been criticized by members of the Sept. 11 commission, as well as House Democrats and civil liberties groups that dislike many of its law enforcement provisions.

The establishment of the job of national intelligence director was the central recommendation of the bipartisan commission, which chronicled the way turf battles and incompetence caused intelligence agencies to bungle clues that might have led them to the Sept. 11 terrorists.

The White House letter, which was dated Monday and signed by Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, was made public on the eve of the first meeting of House and Senate negotiators who have been asked to work out a final bill to enact the major recommendations of the commission before the Nov. 2 election.

Negotiators from both parties have said it is unclear whether they can meet the deadline, especially since any compromise bill would need to be approved by the full House and Senate before it could be sent to President Bush for his signature.

"We're going to give it the best shot that we can," said Representative Peter Hoekstra, Republican of Michigan and chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. Mr. Hoekstra, who has been named to lead the House-Senate conference committee, said he believed "the conferees are all acting in good faith, and if they are, I believe it is possible to get a bill this week."

The legislation's fate has been an issue on the campaign trail, with Senator John Kerry and his supporters accusing the White House of doing too little to enact the recommendations of the commission, even as the Bush administration warns of pre-election terrorist threats.

In a campaign speech on Monday, Mr. Bush said the White House had already acted on many of the commission's findings and urged Congress "to act quickly" on a bill to enact additional recommendations "so I can sign them into law."

The White House letter, which was also signed by Joshua B. Bolten, the White House budget director, endorsed the extensive budget powers offered to the national intelligence director under the Senate bill.

"To be effective, the N.I.D. must have clear authority to determine the national intelligence budget, strong transfer and reprogramming authorities, explicit authority to allocate appropriations," the letter said, adding that the Senate bill "would provide such budget authority."

The letter also asked the House and Senate negotiators to reject provisions of the House bill that would make it easier to deport foreigners. The provisions, which have been criticized by many lawmakers and civil liberties groups, were not among the recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission.

At the same time, the White House endorsed other provisions of the House bill that would expand law enforcement powers, including new authority to conduct surveillance on terrorism suspects.

The American Civil Liberties Union said it was pleased to see the White House urge Congress to reject some of the deportation provisions, but it said the White House was endorsing other provisions in the House bill that would sharply limit personal freedoms.

"It's a very mixed bag," said Laura W. Murphy, director of the Washington office of the American Civil Liberties Union. The White House, Ms. Murphy said, "continues to stubbornly endorse measures that would cut away at checks and balances for immigrants, expand the Patriot Act, add eight new death penalties and remove meaningful civil liberties protections."

The White House endorsed another element of the House bill, which would prevent disclosure of intelligence budget figures. The Senate bill would make public the overall intelligence budget total, as recommended by the Sept. 11 commission.

"Disclosing to the nation's enemies, especially during wartime, the amounts requested by the president, and provided by Congress, for the conduct of the nation's intelligence activities would harm the national security," the White House letter said.

