

## Agreement May Be Near on 9/11 Bill

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Published: November 19, 2004

ASHINGTON, Nov. 18 - House and Senate negotiators came tantalizingly close to a deal on Thursday to enact the major recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission but continued to haggle into the night over a handful of issues that could still block agreement on a compromise intelligence bill, Congressional officials said.

The officials said that the negotiators on a House-Senate conference committee had largely reached agreement on the central provision of the bill, the creation of the job of national intelligence director to oversee the work of the C.I.A. and other government spy agencies.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, Congressional aides said the compromise would allow the Pentagon to maintain significant power over how tens of billions of dollars are spent each year for intelligence gathering, as House Republican leaders had insisted.

The Senate negotiators, backed by House Democrats and the members of the Sept. 11 commission, had urged that the new national intelligence director have essentially exclusive control over intelligence budgets, including those of spy agencies within the Defense Department.

"But reality set in," said a Democratic Congressional aide who has been involved in the negotiations. "We've run out of time, and the Republicans and the Pentagon just weren't going to budge. I think our best hope is that the national intelligence director is a person of such stature that he can assert his authority even if he doesn't have explicit control over the appropriations."

During marathon talks this week, House Republicans have insisted that they, too, were willing to make significant compromises to get a final bill before Congress adjourns for the year, probably next week.

Congressional officials said Thursday that the compromise bill would give the national intelligence director far more authority to draw up the government's overall intelligence budget than the House Republicans had earlier suggested they would consider. "There have been plenty of compromises on both sides," the Democratic Congressional aide said.

Congressional officials had suggested at midafternoon Thursday that a final agreement was imminent in the negotiations to reconcile the separate House and Senate bills, which

were passed last month in response to the final recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission.

But the negotiations continued into the evening, with lawmakers and their staffs suggesting that the talks might still collapse over a small number of issues, including the insistence of House Republicans that a final bill contain law enforcement and immigration provisions that were not directly related to the commission's recommendations and that have been criticized by civil liberties organizations.

The Senate bill, which was adopted by a 96-to-2 vote, provided the national intelligence director with far greater budget and personnel authority than did the House bill, which was prepared by House Republican leaders with little input from House Democrats. The Sept. 11 commission sided with the Senate bill, while senior Pentagon leaders expressed support for the House bill in its limits on the powers of a national intelligence director.

The House and Senate negotiators say they are facing an imminent deadline for completing a bill, since both the House and the Senate are expected to shut down before the Thanksgiving holiday and not return until next year. The White House has insisted that it is eager for a bill before the Congress adjourns, and as evidence of its campaign, President Bush has been pressing lawmakers for weeks to agree on a bill he can sign this year.

The negotiations Thursday were being conducted behind closed doors by the four most important lawmakers on the conference committee: Senators Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, and Joseph I. Lieberman, a Connecticut Democrat, the chief authors of the bipartisan Senate bill; and Representatives Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the Republican chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, and Jane Harman of California, the committee's ranking Democrat.

Ms. Harman supports the Senate bill, while Mr. Hoekstra has argued the House Republican leaders' case.