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General Says He No Longer Objects to Bill on Spy Post

By PHILIP SHENON and ERIC SCHMITT

ASHINGTON, Dec. 2 - The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Richard B. Myers, said Thursday that his public concerns about a sweeping intelligence overhaul bill had been resolved in the final version of the legislation, a remark that appeared to undercut a group of House Republicans who had cited the general's opposition in blocking a final vote.

General Myers's remarks came as the bill's supporters on Capitol Hill offered new optimism over its prospects and said President Bush appeared to be ready to mount a strong, last-minute lobbying campaign to pressure wavering House Republicans to approve the bill when members of Congress return to Washington next week for a brief meeting.

Senator Susan Collins, the Maine Republican who is the chief Senate architect of the bill, said, "I am basing my optimism on the incredibly persuasive powers of the president of the United States, the commander in chief, who wants this legislation."

The compromise bill, which was hammered out by a House-Senate conference committee last month and has been endorsed by President Bush, would enact the major recommendations of the independent Sept. 11 commission and establish the cabinet-level job of national intelligence director to oversee the C.I.A. and the government's other spy agencies.

Senate aides said Ms. Collins received a call on Thursday from Karl Rove, Mr. Bush's chief political adviser, to say that the president considered passage of the bill to be a priority during the lame-duck session of Congress scheduled for next week, despite continuing reports of Pentagon opposition.

Although General Myers's comments at a meeting with several reporters were cryptic and he declined to offer an endorsement to the overall intelligence bill, he said that a series of concerns he had raised in a highly publicized letter to the House in October had been worked out "satisfactorily."

"The issue that I specifically addressed in a letter to Chairman Hunter has been accommodated," he said, referring to Representative Duncan Hunter of California, the

Republican chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and the bill's leading critic in the House.

In the Oct. 21 letter, which was released to reporters, General Myers offered his support to Mr. Hunter and other House Republicans who want to limit the budget powers of a national intelligence director. Mr. Hunter and his allies want the Pentagon to retain direct control over billions of dollars in spending by three spy agencies that operate within the Defense Department but have many civilian clients: the National Security Agency, the National Reconnaissance Office and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

Although its spending is secret, the National Security Agency, which is responsible for electronic eavesdropping in foreign countries, is widely understood to have the largest budget among the nation's spy agencies, including the C.I.A.

"Establishing the budget process in this manner would allow the combat support agencies to continue their outstanding support to the war-fighters," General Myers wrote in the letter, which Mr. Hunter and other House Republicans have repeatedly cited in arguing against the bill. Senate Republicans have raised no similar objections to the legislation.

With his comments Thursday, General Myers suggested that his concerns in the letter had evaporated, and that House Republicans could no longer use the letter in blocking a vote.

"The issue I commented on, I understand, has been worked satisfactorily in the conference," he said, declining other comment on negotiations over the bill.

Spokesmen for Mr. Hunter, whose opposition blocked a final vote on the bill last month, did not return phone calls on Thursday.

Congressional officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the White House was reported to be ready to provide Mr. Hunter with a letter in which President Bush would assure him that the White House would not allow the bill to interfere with the military's chain of command, the criticism raised repeatedly by Mr. Hunter in recent days.

They said the White House appeared to be willing to override the objections of the bill's other chief critic among House Republicans, Representative F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. of Wisconsin, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, who opposed the legislation after it was stripped of law enforcement and immigration provisions that had been criticized by civil liberties groups.

"The president is working to try to bring everybody together so that we can move forward and get this intelligence reform passed," said Scott McClellan, the White House spokesman. "It is something that he is working very hard on, and we will continue to do so in hopes of getting it passed next week."

