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Bush Pressuring G.O.P. to Approve Intelligence Bill

By PHILIP SHENON

President Bush sought to stem a near-rebellion by members of his own party in Congress yesterday by describing a sweeping intelligence-overhaul bill they oppose as an effort "to do everything necessary to confront and defeat the terrorist threat" and calling for its passage during a brief Congressional session this week.

The president's remarks in his weekly radio address came a day after a powerful Senate Republican, John W. Warner of Virginia, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, expressed doubts about the bill, which would enact the major recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission and create a cabinet-level director of national intelligence.

Mr. Warner, the first member of the Senate from either party to raise such concerns publicly since the final bill was hammered out last month, said he wanted to resolve issues in the legislation that "may impact the time-tested chain of command" within the Defense Department.

His comments echo those of a group of House Republicans who blocked a vote on the bill last month.

Under the bill, the Pentagon, which is now believed to control about 80 percent of the government's estimated \$40 billion intelligence budget, would have to cede some authority to a new national intelligence director, resulting in a similar loss of oversight authority for the Senate committee led by Mr. Warner, as well as the Armed Services Committee in the House.

Congressional officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity given the delicate nature of the discussions, said the White House chief of staff, Andrew H. Card, and Vice President Dick Cheney were involved in talks to appease the bill's opponents on Capitol Hill. One option may be to rewrite the legislation to provide additional guarantees to the Defense Department over its control of three large spy agencies that now reside within the Pentagon but provide intelligence to agencies outside the Defense Department.

The largest of the three is the National Security Agency, which is responsible for electronic surveillance in foreign countries.

By using his radio address to make his most impassioned public plea to date for the intelligence bill, President Bush raised the stakes in a legislative battle that pits the White House against lawmakers in the president's own party and could suggest trouble for Mr. Bush in pursuing a broader second-term agenda in Congress, including legislation to overhaul the Social Security system and the tax code.

Mr. Bush, the Republican leaders of the House and Senate, and the members of the Sept. 11 commission have all endorsed the intelligence bill. But its final passage is being prevented by a core of conservative House Republicans close to the Pentagon who may now have the support of Mr. Warner.

In the radio address, Mr. Bush said that Congress was being given the opportunity to pass "a strong new law" that "would make America more secure" by coordinating the work of the nation's intelligence agencies, and specifically by creating the job of national intelligence director.

The Sept. 11 commission had urged that the job be created in an effort to force rival intelligence and counterterrorism agencies, notably the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to put aside generations-old turf battles and cooperate against terrorist threats.

In its final report last July, the commission cataloged a series of instances in which spy agencies refused or otherwise failed to share intelligence before Sept. 11 that might have led to disruption of the terrorist plot.

"To be effective, this position must have full budget authority over our intelligence agencies," Mr. Bush said yesterday. "The many elements of our intelligence community must function seamlessly, with an overriding mission: to protect America from attack by terrorists or outlaw regimes."

He added, "The most important provisions of any new bill must create a strong, focused new management structure for our intelligence services and break down the remaining walls that prevent the timely sharing of vital threat information."

He addressed the concerns raised both by Mr. Warner and by House Republican opponents of the bill, with the president insisting that "the legislation preserves the existing chain of command" within the military.

"I urge members of Congress to act next week so I can sign these needed reforms into law," the president said. "We must do everything necessary to confront and defeat the terrorist threat, and that includes intelligence reform."

The intelligence bill, which was approved by a House-Senate conference committee last month, appeared close to passage.

But a final vote in the House was blocked at the last minute by Speaker J. Dennis Hastert,

who has also endorsed the bill, after objections were raised by a group aligned with the Pentagon led by Representative Duncan Hunter of California, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

Until Mr. Warner's comments on Friday, there had been no similar effort by Senate Republicans to stop the bill, and Mr. Warner had voted for the Senate version of the bill. The Senate bill, similar in most ways to the final bill approved by the House and Senate conferees, was passed 96 to 2, with all Republicans in support.