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9/11 Legislation Is Introduced as Congress Returns to Capitol

By CARL HULSE and DAVID STOUT

ASHINGTON, Sept. 7 — Members of Congress returned to the Capitol today to begin what is likely to be a spirited debate over a bill that would put into effect the 41 recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission.

Senators John McCain, Republican of Arizona, and Joseph I. Lieberman, Democrat of Connecticut, introduced the measure this afternoon, just about the time that the Sept. 11 commission's leaders, Chairman Thomas H. Kean and Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton, began testifying before the Senate Intelligence Committee in support of the bill.

The independent, bipartisan 9/11 commission's most important recommendations, and the ones almost sure to generate the hottest arguments, are the creation of a national counterterrorism center and the establishment of a new post, that of national intelligence director, who would have sweeping powers — including budget authority — over the entire intelligence bureaucracy.

"I believe we must — we must — take legislative action," Mr. McCain said this afternoon as he expressed hope that the legislation would not be stalled because of election-season politicking. "These are not normal times."

Mr. Lieberman said the legislation embodied "bold and comprehensive reform that changes the status quo." The status quo, he added, had failed the American people.

"The sweep of reform contained in this bill is broad and historic, as it should be, because the threats that confront us are broad and historic," Mr. Lieberman said.

Companion legislation is about to be introduced in the House of Representatives as well, by Representatives Christopher Shays, Republican of Connecticut, and Carolyn Maloney, Democrat of New York.

Noting the approaching third anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Mr. McCain paid tribute to the families of the victims. Without them, he said, the commission headed by Mr. Kean, a Republican and former governor of New

Jersey, and Mr. Hamilton, a former Democratic Congressman from Indiana, would never have been created.

Mr. McCain embraced Mr. Lieberman at this afternoon's announcement. "Thank you very much, fellow loser," Mr. McCain said in a jocular allusion to their respective failed presidential runs.

Senator Evan Bayh, an Indiana Democrat, who sits on the Senate Armed Services and Intelligence Committees, said lawmakers had already shown that "we can rise above politics in the national interest."

But he added: "It remains to be seen whether we can rise above bureaucratic inertia, turf jealousies and divisions within Congress, and the executive branch can do the same. I am very hopeful that we can. For the sake of our country, I believe that we must."

The Sept. 11 legislation heads a busy agenda that the lawmakers face upon their return from a six-week recess. The lawmakers must also dispose of a dozen required spending bills as well as decide what to do about a popular highway measure and a host of other proposals, all while jockeying for advantage in the November elections, which will decide control of both houses.

To that end, each party has a distinct political agenda. Democrats say they will pressure the Republicans to embrace the Sept. 11 commission's 41 recommendations fully or face the political consequences.

Republicans intend to use their control of both chambers to schedule legislation in an effort to put Democrats on the spot. In the House, the majority plans to hold a vote this month on the proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and will force floor fights over abortion, taxes and reforms to the legal system. In the Senate, Democrats say they expect a floor vote on a proposed constitutional amendment barring flag desecration.

"We should be dealing with the security of the American people, and the Republicans appear to be poised to use the remaining time to score political points," Senator Tom Daschle of South Dakota, the Democratic leader, said in an interview.

In the next pivotal weeks, Republican officials in the House and the Senate say, much of the time will be devoted to the intelligence changes called for in the Sept. 11 report.

"It will be all 9/11, all the time," said Bob Stevenson, a spokesman for Senator Bill Frist, Republican of Tennessee, the majority leader.

It is unclear how long Congress will remain in session at a time when all House members and a third of the Senate are facing re-election. Adjournment is scheduled for Oct. 1, but lawmakers are likely to stay in the capital until mid-October, with a postelection session becoming a possibility.

When the commission report was issued late in July, House Republican officials indicated that they did not expect to move legislation this year. But commission members and relatives of those killed in the Sept. 11 attacks joined Democrats in calling for swifter action, and the Senate indicated that it would also move ahead, putting momentum behind the recommendations.

A rare series of August hearings was conducted on the findings, and a bipartisan group of senators is expected to introduce legislation incorporating the recommendations early this week. Republicans and Democrats alike expect legislation to reach the floor rapidly, with the chief political fight coming over how far the proposals go toward fulfilling the commission's recommendations.

Democrats and some Republicans say Congress must accept all the recommendations. Other Republicans say that while Congress must approve a sweeping set of changes, it will first take aim at the recommendations that have the most direct effect on national security.

"You have to move quickly on the things that will make us safer immediately," said Stuart Roy, a spokesman for the House majority leader, Representative Tom DeLay of Texas. "We are not going to let those things bog down."

Republicans also say that the intelligence legislation could include elements historically opposed by some Democrats, like capital punishment provisions and immigration restrictions, perhaps forcing lawmakers to accept those provisions if they want the overall bill enacted.

Congress appears to be moving with less urgency on the commission's suggestion that both houses change the way they oversee intelligence and domestic security. The Senate has formed a working group to explore changes, including creation of a new joint intelligence committee with broad new powers. But many lawmakers and aides expect that the reorganization covering the executive branch will come first.

With the focus on national security, Congress is unlikely to pass all 13 separate spending bills by the start of the new fiscal year Oct. 1. Just one, the Pentagon bill, has been sent to the president so far. Lawmakers also expect to move quickly on domestic security spending, considering changes in how money is distributed, based on the threats facing large metropolitan areas. Lawmakers could decide to combine many of the other measures into a single bill or choose to continue spending at this year's level and complete the bills after Election Day.

Mr. Daschle said Dr. Frist had told him that he intended to hold a vote as early as this week on the flag amendment. The proposal has passed repeatedly in the House but has always fallen short in the Senate. The issue can cause problems in an election year for lawmakers like Mr. Daschle, who is running for re-election in a conservative state, as well as Senators [John Kerry](#) and [John Edwards](#), the Democratic nominees for the White House.

In the House, Mr. Roy said a vote on the same-sex-marriage amendment would probably occur this month. The Republican leadership also intends to schedule a vote on a measure prohibiting courts from hearing challenges to the wording of the Pledge of Allegiance — largely over inclusion of the phrase "under God" — and will consider a series of bills intended to limit lawsuits.

The outlook is less certain for a measure that many lawmakers consider the most important of the year: a highway and transportation bill packed with billions of dollars for local road and bridge projects. [President Bush](#) has said he will veto any measure that exceeds his spending target, and House Republican leaders are reluctant to get into a showdown so close to the election. If lawmakers are unable to reach a deal, they will have to extend the current program at existing spending levels.

The House and the Senate are also in negotiations over a measure intended to provide tax relief to corporations that now face some trade penalties as a result of actions by the World Trade Organization. That bill could also provide a vehicle to buy tobacco growers out of a Depression-era quota system, an initiative sought by tobacco-state lawmakers, in combination with giving the Food and Drug Administration the power to regulate tobacco.

Lawmakers are also expected to move quickly to provide emergency money for hurricane relief in Florida, with a vote on about \$2 billion in aid coming this week.