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## House GOP Seeks Own Response to 9/11

DeLay, Hastert Stress Chamber's Expertise Rather Than Panel's Recommendations

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Thursday, September 9, 2004; Page A07

While top Democrats and some prominent Republicans are calling on Congress to approve all 41 recommendations of the commission that investigated the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, House GOP leaders are taking a notably different tack. Saying they will craft their own bill and rely heavily on their own expertise, they sometimes scoff at those who simply want to write the commission's proposals into law.

Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) told reporters yesterday: "I think it was highly inappropriate to call for immediate passage of the 9/11 commission recommendations" dealing with intelligence-gathering and anti-terrorism efforts. His comment was aimed mainly at Democratic presidential nominee John F. Kerry and top congressional Democrats. But it effectively encompassed numerous Republicans, including Sen. John McCain (Ariz.), who also advocate enacting all the commission's recommendations.

DeLay said it was "pretty laughable" for House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to offer a bill that she says was drawn directly from the 41 recommendations. Asked how many of the recommendations the House might adopt, he replied: "Who knows? . . . Whatever is the right thing to do." DeLay said the House will rely largely on its own expertise and insights, adding that "we have plenty of experts on our committees."

DeLay's comments, which were echoed by aides to Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), entail some political risk in a climate in which commission members and many relatives of victims of the attacks are calling for the prompt adoption of virtually all the recommendations. Kerry and congressional Democrats have accused President Bush and GOP lawmakers of dawdling, and yesterday, they ramped up the pressure on Republicans.

Soon after the commission issued its report in July, the GOP-led Congress "took six weeks of vacation," according to House Democratic Caucus Chairman Robert Menendez (N.J.). "The problem is that terrorists did not take six weeks of vacation from their plotting, from their planning," Menendez said at a news conference in the Capitol.

On Tuesday, the commission's two leaders -- Chairman Thomas H. Kean and Vice Chairman Lee H. Hamilton -- joined four senators at a news conference that extolled a bipartisan bill embracing essentially all of the commission's recommendations. Kean, a Republican, called the legislation "our dream."

DeLay, asked yesterday if he would accept the Senate bill, replied: "No."

Some House Republicans support Hastert and DeLay's plan to assemble a bill in about two weeks based on several committees' input, but they say that it is politically risky. "This is an opportunity to do some other things that need to be done" and are not included in the 41 recommendations, said Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.), chairman of the Government Reform Committee. "But if, God forbid, there was an intervening [terrorist] event while Congress was futzing around, the politics of that would be horrendous."

While DeLay and Hastert were stressing their independence from the Senate and the Sept. 11 commission yesterday, Bush for the first time embraced the commission's recommendation to give the proposed new national intelligence director full budgetary authority over the government's various intelligence-gathering agencies. DeLay was noncommittal after meeting with Bush and other top lawmakers at the White House. "We need to take his proposal and look at it," he told reporters.

The 41 recommendations range from the often-discussed intelligence director with far-reaching budgetary powers to the lesser-known call for new technologies to scan travelers' fingerprints, retinas or other "biometric signatures." **The panel's report calls for tighter standards for issuing birth certificates, drivers' licenses and similar documents.**

Six House committees have jurisdiction over various aspects of the recommendations, and Hastert is treating them equally in soliciting ideas. Senate leaders, by contrast, have asked the Government Affairs Committee to consider all the proposals and to send a bill to the full Senate this month. Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) told reporters yesterday it was unclear which proposal will emerge as the "base bill" for drafting the legislation.

Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.), who attended the White House meeting, later said that there are "conflicting views about the urgency" of addressing the 41 recommendations but that he sensed Bush has lined up on the side of urgency.

House sources said some of the biggest objections to the Sept. 11 commission's recommendations come from lawmakers with close ties to the Pentagon, which receives 80 percent of the budget for intelligence activities. At an Aug. 17 hearing, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld warned that sweeping reforms could hamper U.S. military operations. "If we move unwisely and get it wrong, the penalty would be great," he said.

In telephone interviews yesterday, Kean and Hamilton expressed little concern about the House leaders' talk of deviating from the report's recommendations. "We don't think we're Moses come down with the Ten Commandments," Kean said. As long as Congress adopts the main proposals, including a strong national director of intelligence, commission members will be satisfied, he said.

*Staff writer Helen Dewar and researcher Lucy Shackelford contributed to this report.*



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