

President Bush Commends Congress on Passage of Intelligence Legislation

Washington, D.C.

When our intelligence professionals have the legal tools to gather information about the intentions of our enemies, America is safer. And when these same legal tools also protect the civil liberties of Americans, then we can have the confidence to know that we can preserve our freedoms while making America safer.

The Protect America Act, passed with bipartisan support in the House and Senate, achieves both of these goals by modernizing the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Over the past three decades this law has not kept pace with revolutionary changes in technology. As a result, our intelligence professionals have told us that they are missing significant intelligence information that they need to protect the country.

S.1927 reforms FISA by accounting for changes in technology and restoring the statute to its original focus on appropriate protections for the rights of persons in the United States - and not foreign targets located in foreign lands.

Today we face a dynamic threat from enemies who understand how to use modern technology against us. Whether foreign terrorists, hostile nations, or other actors, they change their tactics frequently and seek to exploit the very openness and freedoms we hold dear. Our tools to deter them must also be dynamic and flexible enough to meet the challenges they pose. This law gives our intelligence professionals this greater flexibility while closing a dangerous gap in our intelligence gathering activities that threatened to weaken our defenses.

We know that information we have been able to acquire about foreign threats will help us detect and prevent attacks on our homeland. Mike McConnell, the Director of National Intelligence, has assured me that this bill gives him the most immediate tools he needs to defeat the intentions of our enemies. And so in signing this legislation today I am heartened to know that his critical work will be strengthened and we will be better armed to prevent attacks in the future.

I commend members of Congress who supported these important reforms, and also for acting before adjourning for recess. In particular, I want to thank Mitch McConnell and John Boehner for their strong leadership on this issue, and Senators Kit Bond and Dianne Feinstein for coming together in the Senate on an effective bipartisan solution. In the House of Representatives, Pete Hoekstra and Heather Wilson were instrumental in securing enactment of this vital piece of legislation before the August recess, and I thank them for their leadership.

While I appreciate the leadership it took to pass this bill, we must remember that our work is not done. This bill is a temporary, narrowly focused statute to deal with the most immediate shortcomings in the law.

When Congress returns in September the Intelligence committees and leaders in both parties will need to complete work on the comprehensive reforms requested by Director McConnell, including the important issue of providing meaningful liability protection to those who are alleged to have assisted our Nation following the attacks of September 11, 2001.

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