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Contact: Jamal Ware
(202) 225-4121

Hoekstra, Republicans Fault Flawed Intelligence Bill

Intelligence Authorization Fails to Address Real National Security Issues

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, joined with fellow Republicans to vote against a Fiscal Year 2010 Intelligence Authorization Bill that focused more on providing partisan, political cover for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi than support for America's intelligence professionals against ongoing threats.

“The committee had a strong, bipartisan notification provision in last year's intelligence bill and it should have been reintroduced this year,” Hoekstra said. “Unfortunately Democrats felt they needed to propose new legislative language in response to the deep, political troubles caused by the Speaker's still unsubstantiated claims against the CIA. They did nothing, however, to address or follow-up on her claim that the CIA lies to Congress ‘all the time,’ which was echoed again in committee deliberations by Congresswoman Anna Eshoo.”

Hoekstra noted that the FY 2009 Intelligence bill notification, approved on a bipartisan basis by the committee, required the notification of the full committee unless the chairman and ranking member agreed to restrict access to particular information. He pointed out that the provision in the FY 2010 bill only required the administration and Congress to create processes for notification, but lacked the requirement to brief contained in the previous bill.

Republicans were successful in getting an amendment approved by Congressman Mike Rogers, R-Mich., to prevent mirandizing captured foreign terrorists and were successful in getting an agreement from committee Democrats to hold hearings and conduct an evaluation of the FBI Global Justice Initiative. Democrats refused, however, to cut off funding for the initiative, which could put law enforcement ahead of intelligence gathering in critical situations.

“Our first priority has to be the collection of intelligence when we capture terrorists and combatants on the battlefield,” Hoekstra said. “Intelligence is a perishable asset and any delay in its collection puts our forces in the field, our allies and our nation at greater risk.”

Despite the obvious national security implications of the closure of the prison facility at Guantanamo Bay, Hoekstra pointed out that the underlying bill did not address the facility’s closure or the relocation of its terrorist detainees. He called it a major oversight and questioned why trained terrorists were being released to Bermuda or Palau despite the clear concerns of the British government and the citizens of the Islands.

To ensure committee consideration of the Obama administration’s rushed decision to close Guantanamo Bay by an arbitrary deadline, Republicans offered a number of amendments. Congresswoman Sue Myrick, R-N.C., and Roy Blunt, R-Mo., sponsored provisions that would prevent the use of intelligence funds to transfer detainees to the United States and barred the administration from using intelligence funds to hide secret payments to foreign governments for taking terrorist detainees. Democrats approved a watered-down version of the Myrick amendment on detainee transfers and rejected Blunt’s amendment to prevent secret payments.

“The American people have made clear they do not want Guantanamo terrorists brought to neighborhoods in the United States,” Hoekstra said. “They also would clearly object to the use of classified, intelligence funds to pay other countries to accept Gitmo detainees. Using intelligence funds provides an easy way to conceal from the American taxpayer payments to foreign governments, so that is why we sought to ensure all payments were transparent and open to public scrutiny.”

Hoekstra was successful in getting an amendment approved to require an unclassified report on Guantanamo detainee recidivism be made publicly available. The committee also adopted his amendment requiring an unclassified, public report on intelligence on the freed Guantanamo Uighur detainees.

Republicans also offered an amendment to require the CIA to make publicly available an unclassified version of the records on enhanced interrogation briefings to Congress as well as certain finished intelligence products assessing the information gained from detainee reporting. Hoekstra noted that despite the fact that the Speaker Pelosi asked for the release of documents kept by CIA during congressional briefings on enhanced interrogation, Democrats blocked public disclosure on a party-line vote.

“The Obama administration promised transparency and openness and along those lines, these amendments should have been embraced by Democrats,” Hoekstra said. “While we welcome many of the Obama administration’s arguments that echo Bush administration arguments on the importance of protecting certain national security information, the decision to release the interrogation memos partially opened this door and the American people should be allowed to walk all the way through.”

Hoekstra said that taken as a whole, the bill shows that Democrats embrace selective disclosure of information and transparency only when it is politically convenient.

“The Democrats apparently saw no national security problems and only chose to address the political ones faced by Speaker Pelosi,” Hoekstra said. “It’s too bad, because this could have been a strong, bipartisan bill.”