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Office of the Press Secretary
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President's Radio Address

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. This week I visited with troops at Charleston Air Force Base. These fine men and women are serving courageously to protect our country against dangerous enemies. The terrorist network that struck America on September the 11th wants to strike our country again. To stop them, our military, law enforcement, and intelligence professionals need the best possible information about who the terrorists are, where they are, and what they are planning.

One of the most important ways we can gather that information is by monitoring terrorist communications. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act -- also known as FISA -- provides a critical legal foundation that allows our intelligence community to collect this information while protecting the civil liberties of Americans. But this important law was written in 1978, and it addressed the technologies of that era. This law is badly out of date -- and Congress must act to modernize it.

Today we face sophisticated terrorists who use disposable cell phones and the Internet to communicate with each other, recruit operatives, and plan attacks on our country. Technologies like these were not available when FISA was passed nearly 30 years ago, and FISA has not kept up with new technological developments. As a result, our Nation is hampered in its ability to gain the vital intelligence we need to keep the American people safe. In his testimony to Congress in May, Mike McConnell, the Director of National Intelligence, put it this way: We are "significantly burdened in capturing overseas communications of foreign terrorists planning to conduct attacks inside the United States."

To fix this problem, my Administration has proposed a bill that would modernize the FISA statute. This legislation is the product of months of discussion with members of both parties in the House and the Senate -- and it includes four key reforms: First, it brings FISA up to date with the changes in communications technology that have taken place over the past three decades. Second, it seeks to restore FISA to its original focus

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on protecting the privacy interests of people inside the United States, so we don't have to obtain court orders to effectively collect foreign intelligence about foreign targets located in foreign locations. Third, it allows the government to work more efficiently with private-sector entities like communications providers, whose help is essential. And fourth, it will streamline administrative processes so our intelligence community can gather foreign intelligence more quickly and more effectively, while protecting civil liberties.

Our intelligence community warns that under the current statute, we are missing a significant amount of foreign intelligence that we should be collecting to protect our country. Congress needs to act immediately to pass this bill, so that our national security professionals can close intelligence gaps and provide critical warning time for our country.

As the recent National Intelligence Estimate reported, America is in a heightened threat environment. Reforming FISA will help our intelligence professionals address those threats -- and they should not have to wait any longer. Congress will soon be leaving for its August recess. I ask Republicans and Democrats to work together to pass FISA modernization now, before they leave town. Our national security depends on it.

Thank you for listening.

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