

Statement on Congressional Action on Intelligence Reform Legislation

January 24, 2008

Last August, Congress passed the Protect America Act, which updated our foreign intelligence surveillance law to adapt to today's technology and to meet today's threats. This bipartisan legislation has aided our efforts to monitor the communications of terrorists and other foreign intelligence targets.

Unfortunately, Congress set this legislation to expire on February 1st. That is just 8 days from today—yet the threat from Al Qaida will not expire in 8 days.

If Congress does not act quickly, our national security professionals will not be able to count on critical tools they need to protect our Nation, and our ability to respond quickly to new threats and circumstances will be weakened. That means it will become harder to figure out what our enemies are doing to recruit terrorists and infiltrate them into our country.

Last fall, the Senate Intelligence Committee completed its work on a bipartisan bill to modernize our foreign intelligence surveillance law. I commend Senators Rockefeller and Bond, the committee's chairman and vice chairman, for leading the effort to complete work on this bill.

The Senate Intelligence Committee's bill contains many provisions that our intelligence officials say they need to protect our country. The bill would maintain the vital flow of intelligence on terrorist threats. It would protect the freedoms of Americans while making sure we do not extend those same protections to terrorists overseas. And it would provide liability protection to companies now facing billion-dollar lawsuits only because they are believed to have assisted in efforts to defend our Nation following the 9/11 attacks.

This bill still needs some changes, but I am optimistic that with good will on both sides, we can make those changes quickly. So I ask congressional leaders to follow the course set by their colleagues on the Senate Intelligence Committee, bring this legislation to a prompt vote in both Houses, and send me a bill that I can sign before the Protect America Act expires on February 1st.

Congress's action—or lack of action—on this important issue will directly affect our ability to keep Americans safe.

Remarks to the “Congress of Tomorrow” Luncheon in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia

January 25, 2008

Thank you all. Thank you. I want to thank Tom; he read it just like I wrote it. [*Laughter*] Thanks for your warm welcome. I'm glad to be with you. I'm looking forward to spending some of the afternoon with you, and then I've got to get back to write the State of the Union he was talking about.

Two issues I'm going to talk about in the State of the Union require our immediate attention, and that's an economic growth package that will keep this economy of ours healthy and legislation making sure our professionals—our intelligence professionals have the tools they need to protect the United States of America.

I am confident in the long-term strength of our Nation's economy. I believe that the fundamentals are sound. I know the entrepreneurial spirit is high. We have a flexible, we have a resilient, and we have a dynamic economy. But there are some uncertainties. And after a lot of thought, I called on the Congress, and your leaders responded to enact a growth package so we can reduce the risk of an economic downturn this year.

Speaker Pelosi and Leader Boehner have demonstrated strong leadership. They reached an agreement on a proposal that will have a positive impact on our economy. Congress should move it quickly. And I understand the desire to add provisions from both the right and the left. I strongly believe it would be a mistake to delay or derail this bill.

This package is big enough to affect the economy in positive ways. It will provide immediate help, and it's temporary. The entire package is tax relief. There are no tax increases, no unnecessary spending or regulatory projects, income tax cuts for a lot of people, as well as bonus depreciation for small—for our businesses and small business expensing. It's a sound package. It makes a

lot of sense. It's needed, and you need to pass it as quickly as possible to get money in the hands of the people who are going to help this economy stay strong.

Now, I want you—I'll make sure you understand in the State of the Union that this package certainly doesn't mean we ought to do something else on taxes. And the best thing we can do to deal with uncertainty in the economy is make the tax cuts we passed permanent. [*Applause*] Thank you. Thank you all.

Our most solemn duty is to protect the American people, and I appreciate the fact that we've worked closely together over the last 7 years to do just that. That is our most solemn duty. Fortunately, we've got a lot of good people working hard to help us protect America, and these professionals need the tools they need to do their jobs.

You know, one of the most important tools is to be able to figure out the intentions of an enemy that still wants to do us harm. If they're making calls into America, we need to know why they're calling, what they're thinking, and what they're planning. We passed the Protect America Act that has aided our efforts to monitor the communications of terrorists and foreign intelligence targets. And I want to thank the good work of the people here to get that bill passed last year.

Unfortunately, the bill is set to expire in 7 days. The threat to America does not expire in 7 days. The Senate Intelligence Committee completed work last fall on a bipartisan bill that we can support. It may need some tweaks, but it's a good bill in this sense: It will maintain the vital flow of intelligence on terrorist threats to protect the privacy of Americans while making sure we do not extend those same protections to terrorists overseas; it will provide liability protection to companies now facing billion dollars in lawsuits only because they are believed to have assisted the efforts to defend our Nation following the 9/11 attacks.

I'm looking forward to coming before you in Congress and to say as plainly as I can, this bill is important to the security of the United States of America, and the Congress needs to gets a good bill to my desk as soon as possible.

Anyway, I'm looking forward to working with you. I thank you. I appreciate the leadership. I appreciate the chance to come and visit with you. Thank you for being friends. Thank you for serving our country.

I also want to thank your families. I understand—I think I've told you this before, I understand what it does to a family to be in public service. You just can't thank our spouses and kids enough for joining in a noble cause of serving the greatest country on the face of the Earth.

I'm proud to be able to thank you and call you friends. I'm proud to be able to thank your families for serving our country as well. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:47 p.m. at The Greenbriar. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Tom Price of Georgia.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

January 19

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

January 21

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President had a telephone briefing with Secretary of the Treasury Henry M. Paulson, Jr., on the global financial markets situation.

January 22

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, in the East Room, he participated in a breakfast to honor the 35th annual March for Life. He then met with his economic advisers.

The President announced his intention to nominate Margaret Scobey to be Ambassador to Egypt.