

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

January 24, 2008

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

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 Qaeda 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 Nine-Eleven attacks.

This bill still needs some changes, but I am optimistic that with goodwill 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' action - or lack of action - on this important issue will directly affect our ability to keep Americans safe.

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