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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority leader, the minority leader or the minority whip limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) for 5 minutes.

CONGRESSIONAL REFORM OF INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY OVERSIGHT

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the importance of our national intelligence capability and what we in Congress must do to improve it.

Just a few weeks ago, the Commission on Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Robb-Silverman Commission, issued its report. One of the many charges leveled by the commission against the intelligence community, perhaps the most damning, is the intelligence community collects far too little information on many of the issues we care about most.

As the commission also points out, without information, analysis turns to guesswork. The state of the affairs in our intelligence community is alarming, dangerous and frankly unacceptable.

Within the span of 2 years, the United States has had two very obvious and public examples of intelligence failures. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and the dead wrong conclusions reached about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs.

The 9/11 Commission took the first step in identifying what ails the intelligence community, by pointing out that it's a community in name only. It needs centralized direction and coordination. The intelligence reform bill Congress enacted last year establishes a director of national intelligence and tries to address this problem.

I also believe that Congress did not challenge the intelligence community aggressively enough before we invaded Iraq, either in the issue of weapons of mass destruction, or the likely aftermath of the invasion. We, in Congress must help the intelligence community move beyond the cold war mentality and focus more effectively on the challenges we face from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and from al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups within global reach.

But, beyond fixing the intelligence community, Congress needs to get its own house in order. We must do a better job of oversight of the intelligence community. Restoring effective and constructive Congressional oversight should be a top bipartisan priority in the 109th Congress. I believe there will be value in putting together a bicameral, bipartisan select committee like the Joint Economic Committee or the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy of the past, to take a hard look at how Congress should reform itself to better perform oversight of our intelligence.

In my view, the House and the Senate need similar structures to handle intelligence matters, so that the budget requests, legislative referrals and conferences between the two bodies on authorizations and appropriations are handled logically and simply and without disconnection or disfunction.

How would such a select committee work? Membership could be appointed by the leadership on both sides from committees that deal with intelligence matters now. The committee could garner input from various groups including the intelligence community, other governmental organizations such as CRO, CBO and GAO, and from outside groups such as think tanks, former Members of Congress, and experts in the field.

Moreover, both the 9/11 Commission and the Robb-Silverman Commission made suggestions about how Congress should reform itself to do a better job with intelligence issues. These recommendations should be explored in depth. There are a number of fundamental questions that should be rethought: Which committee should have jurisdiction and oversight responsibilities for intelligence matters? Should there be a separate intelligence appropriations subcommittee? Should intelligence responsibility in Congress continue to be divided along programmatic lines, the JMIP, the TIARA, and the NIP? Should the current Select Committee on Intelligence be made permanent?

Mr. Speaker, these are not partisan questions, and they should not be addressed in a partisan fashion. I believe that for the sake of our own national security we must avoid a partisan blame game. We should focus on how to fix the intelligence community that is still reeling from its public failures and struggling to digest organizational reforms that we have already enacted.

At the same time, Congress must restore its own effective and constructive oversight over intelligence matters. I think a bicameral, bipartisan select committee could rise above the partisan and turf tensions that exist, and I urge Leader PELOSI and Speaker HASTERT to strongly consider this option as a way to improve the system.

In the final analysis, the intelligence community, the administration and the Congress must work all together to

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