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Hoekstra Opening Statement for House Intelligence Committee World Wide Threats Hearing

WASHINGTON, D.C. - *The House Intelligence Committee today heard public testimony from Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair on potential threats to the national security of the United States. U.S. Rep Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, released the following opening statement, as prepared for delivery:*

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to welcome Director Blair to his first worldwide threats hearing before the House Intelligence Committee.

“This hearing is one of the most important for this committee. This hearing lays out the security threats facing our nation. It also will highlight what U.S. intelligence agencies are doing to protect us from these threats. Because most of this hearing occurs in public, it gives the American people an opportunity to watch Congress performing oversight of U.S. intelligence and promoting U.S. national security. I hope that in listening to this testimony, the American people will better understand that our nation faces real and serious threats.

“I know from experience that much of this information is very sensitive. Many of the details cannot be discussed in public. Instead, let me raise three serious problems that you need to be aware of. In your testimony today, I would appreciate hearing how you plan to address these problems.

Lack of Accountability in the Intelligence Community

“First of all, I have been absolutely appalled by the attitude of certain people within the Intelligence Community who mistakenly believe that they are not accountable to anyone outside of the Intelligence Community. This shocking disdain for outside oversight was most recently displayed in the CIA Inspector General’s Report on the Peru counternarcotics program. According to this report, the CIA helped a foreign government shoot down an aircraft believed to be operated by drug smugglers. The report also found that the CIA did not follow proper procedures to protect innocent lives. The CIA’s carelessness led to the death of

Veronica Bowers and her infant daughter, Charity—two American citizens who were my constituents. In fact, Veronica Bowers’ parents are also the constituents of one of our new Committee Members, Mr. Miller, from Florida.

“The Inspector General also found that certain CIA employees misled and withheld information from the Justice Department, Congress and the White House regarding the repeated lack of proper procedures in this program. In short, CIA officers disregarded the rules, their carelessness resulted in the death of innocent Americans and they then tried to cover up their carelessness, including perhaps lying to Congress.

“I do not believe the intelligence community or Congress have done much to review this matter. We learned about this in November. It’s February, almost March now. This Committee has not had one hearing or one briefing on the IG report about the Bowers’ shoot down. No investigations have been launched. No witnesses interviewed. No reports filed. Nothing. Perhaps if these suspect flights in Peru involved banned steroids bound for professional baseball players, this Congress would pay more attention. With all the attention generated by the “steroids in baseball” hearings, we finally see major league players being investigated and perhaps going to jail for lying to Congress. What more will it take for the same thing to happen to CIA employees who may have lied to Congress?

In all these discussions of threats and countermeasures, I would like to hear from you, Mr. Director, what you plan to do to bring accountability back to the Community. How do you plan to earn back our trust?

Continued Threat from Radical Jihadists

“Secondly, with the Administration’s decision to close Guantanamo Bay, I would like to hear when the Administration is going to lay out a plan for addressing the threat from radical jihadists. Many tactical decisions regarding the threat from jihadism are being made, but I have yet to hear the administration outline its long-term strategy for containing and ultimately defeating the threat. How are you going to ensure that efforts to combat radical jihadists are properly resourced in light of planned budget cuts? In what direction do you see the Administration leading America’s fight against radical jihadism and what would you recommend?

Vision for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence

“Finally, I am concerned by the dramatic shift away from Congress’ vision of the size, composition and function of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. When we passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, we created a new position to help manage the community and break down barriers between agencies. We deliberately broke apart the functions of the old Director of Central Intelligence and gave the CIA its own Director. The DNI was to be a coordinator of the intelligence community, a ‘community organizer’ of sorts. The DNI’s staff was intended to be very small and efficient. It was supposed to stay away from operational management.

“In four years, Mr. Director, we now have an ODNI that we hardly recognize. The ODNI under your predecessors became entangled in management, grew enormous in size, and has amassed too many scarce intelligence resources for itself. Instead of a lean coordinating body, we got fat, layer upon layer of bureaucracy at the top of the community.

“Director Blair, I again welcome you to your first public hearing before this committee. The threats to our nation are indeed real, but so are the continued challenges in intelligence community management. With that, I wish you best of success in your crucial work to help protect our nation and look forward to hearing your testimony.”