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Hoekstra Effort to Strip Earmarks from Intelligence Bill Successful

Bill Still Fails to Close Terrorist Loophole

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., the top Republican on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, today successfully led an effort to strip all earmarks from the FY'09 Intelligence Authorization bill.

“Even though requests for earmarks are made public, the classified nature of the underlying programs means that transparency for the public does not exist,” Hoekstra said. “Given the highly classified nature of this bill, the best assurance we can give the American people that Congress is spending taxpayer money wisely is to spend it on national security, not earmarked requests.”

Hoekstra added that approval of the intelligence authorization bill requires a high degree of trust on the part of the American people because it is the one bill Congress approves annually that is largely secret. He went on to say that he doubted including earmarks would improve the confidence Americans had in a bill in which much of the text cannot be viewed by the public.

This is the second year in a row that Hoekstra has sponsored a provision to remove all earmarks from the highly classified bill. It was approved on a strong, bipartisan 17-4 vote.

Hoekstra also was critical of the committee’s failure to accept an amendment by U.S. Rep. Heather Wilson, R-N.M., that would have added the bipartisan, Senate terrorist surveillance bill to the authorization. He noted, however, that the amendment only fell one vote short of passage.

“This is the bill by which Congress sets the funding levels and the authorities for America’s intelligence agencies,” Hoekstra said. “What message does it send that the Congress has rejected one of the intelligence community’s highest priorities? Our nation’s terrorist surveillance capabilities continue to erode, as Senator Rockefeller has noted. So has our capability to protect our homeland, our embassies and troops overseas, and our allies.”

Hoekstra also sponsored an amendment, rejected by committee Democrats, that would prohibit the intelligence community from adopting speech codes that encumber accurately describing the radical

jihadist terrorists that attacked America and continue to threaten the homeland.

“Trying to impose speech codes on how to describe our enemy smacks of McCarthyism in reverse,” Hoekstra said. “Al-Qaeda knows point blank that they want to kill Americans. How sad is it that as we approach the seventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, we are still debating how to define our enemy?”

Hoekstra said the House bill cuts bureaucratic growth at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the third year in a row the committee has signaled its opposition to size increases in the office. U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., helped lead Republican efforts to hold ODNI staffing at its 2008 level.

“This committee on a bipartisan basis had made clear that it views ODNI as a coordinator, not a doer of functions,” Hoekstra said. “Our effort is about making ODNI an effective coordinator, not another layer of bureaucracy that stifles the speed, agility and creativity necessary in today’s intelligence environment.”

Republicans on the committee also banded together to oppose politically correct “environmental spying” mandates. Republicans, as they did during last year’s authorization debate, questioned the diversion of limited intelligence resources to study climate change and pointed to the fact that more than a dozen federal agencies are responsible for researching the issue.

“No one has yet demonstrated what clandestine effort or secret capability is needed to study climate change,” Hoekstra said. “Climate science may help inform our nation’s intelligence assessments, but I don’t see how our intelligence assessments can help inform climate science.”

The committee approved the bill by voice vote. It now goes to the full House for consideration.