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House Intelligence Committee holds hearing on federal personnel policies

Washington, D.C. – House Intelligence Committee Chairman Silvestre Reyes, D-TX, convened a closed, full-Committee budget hearing today on personnel and security issues. Reyes, a former federal employee who served for 26 ½ years in the U.S. Border Patrol, has concerns about current and proposed personnel and security policies and their potential impact on the men and women working in the U.S. intelligence community.

“Today, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence convened a hearing on the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2008 budget proposal for investments in personnel management, diversity, training, and security for professionals in the Intelligence Community (IC),” said Chairman Reyes. “The detailed budget numbers and personnel levels are classified, which required us to conduct this hearing in a closed session. However, given the importance of this issue to the overall mission of the IC, and given the intense interest in these matters among the IC workforce, it is appropriate to highlight some of the issues related to today’s hearing.

“First, the people who work in the Intelligence Community are some of our nation’s greatest assets. Many of them work under cover, and often under fire, in some of the most dangerous places in the world. Like our colleagues in the military or the Foreign Service, we often ask them to separate from their families and conduct dangerous missions on behalf of the American people. Earlier this month, during the Easter recess, I had the great honor of visiting many of these individuals in South Asia and the Middle East. Their dedication, bravery, and professionalism are an inspiration.

“For that reason, every one of our investments should start with people. We should ask: is this investment going to enhance the cadre of trained, cleared national security professionals? Is this investment going to make them better equipped to deal with the challenges our nation faces? Are we attracting, recruiting, clearing, training, and retaining the right people to help achieve the ultimate objective of producing accurate, timely, and policy-relevant information for our nation’s military and civilian leaders?

“Many before me have raised these issues, but we now need a renewed sense of urgency. Our intelligence agencies are experiencing exponential growth. CIA Director Michael Hayden said earlier this week that half of all CIA employees have been hired since 9/11. The President mandated aggressive growth in the numbers of intelligence officers and analysts, and the mere challenge of keeping up with this growth is taxing our agencies. If done correctly, this growth will strengthen our nation for a generation. If done poorly, this growth could weaken our defenses, waste precious resources, and cause us to repeat the mistakes of the past.”

Today’s hearing was designed to explore several important topics:

Diversity

“The Administration’s proposed budget includes funds to increase diversity in the IC. To meet complex and emerging threats, the IC needs to have a diverse workforce – in cultural backgrounds, race, ethnicity, gender and language skills,” said Reyes. “In FY 2006, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) reported that the IC was 21% minority (vs. 37% of the overall U.S. population) and 39% women (vs. 51% of the overall U.S. population). As the DNI has acknowledged, the IC needs to make progress in several key areas, including minority and female representation among managers. We will press the DNI to describe how the IC is making progress on this issue.”

Education and Training

“The Administration’s proposed budget includes funds to support training and language initiatives,” said Reyes. “The Committee will scrutinize the DNI’s plan to improve critical language proficiency, particularly Arabic and Chinese, as well as some of the more region-specific languages, such as Urdu, Pashto, Dari, and Farsi. Also, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) mandated that the DNI identify educational and training requirements for scientific and technological fields. We will assess how the DNI is meeting those goals.”

Security Clearances

“The Security Clearance system remains broken – with too little interagency coordination and far too many delays in getting cleared individuals deployed to the right positions,” said Reyes. “For a nation at war, this issue requires urgency. The goal of this hearing was to examine the impact of the clearance process in the IC and the progress the DNI is making in the area of institutionalizing a multi-level security clearance policy advocated by the Committee. Future hearings will review how the IC interacts with other Executive Branch agencies, such as the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Defense Security Service.”

Joint Duty Assignments

“Joint Duty Assignments have become the hallmark of an integrated, joint workforce in the military. Last year, the DNI issued a directive to IC personnel to serve at least one year outside their home agencies before being promoted,” said Reyes. “The FY08 budget includes funds to

begin phased implementation of this system, and the goal of today's hearing was to focus on how the DNI intends to measure success in this area."

Performance-Based Personnel System

"The FY08 budget includes funding to complete the detailed design and development of a "pay-for-performance" system," said Reyes. "I am concerned that the Committee has not seen enough detail on this proposal. While we all support the goal of rewarding high-performers, it is imperative that we are rewarding the right kind of performance, and that employees have the ability to help design the system in which they will have to operate. We will give careful scrutiny to this proposal to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect our most important resource — people."

Contractors

"The IC's over-reliance on contractors presents huge challenges – both in terms of financial cost to the taxpayer, but also in our ability to retain high-quality government employees," said Reyes. "There are poor oversight and accounting controls over many contracted-for programs, and we must understand how the DNI intends to alleviate this problem."