

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

House Democrats Allow Protect America Act to Expire

Since last August, the Democratic House majority has played political games with a critical anti-terror law, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), passing one temporary extension after another.

It's been over 30 years since Congress first enacted FISA, and in that time, telecommunications technology as well as the threats that face America have changed dramatically.

The Protect America Act is temporary legislation that updates FISA – filling gaps and loopholes in the original, dated legislation. First passed in August, the Protect America Act is set to expire this

weekend.

The ongoing debate reached a new low last week when the Democratic majority chose to adjourn for the President's Day recess without considering the bipartisan bill passed by the Senate.

The current 15-day extension expired at midnight on Saturday. After this time, our intelligence community will be forced to go through needless bureaucratic hurdles to open new terrorist surveillance cases.

According to Glenn Sulmasy, an expert on national security law and a fellow at Harvard University, "While the Protect America Act (PAA) has only been in effect for just over six months, the impact of the legislation has been considerable.

“The PAA has allowed the United States to close a significant intelligence gap by enabling intelligence professionals to collect, without a court order, foreign intelligence on targets located overseas – known as ‘foreign-to-foreign contacts’ – regardless of how the information is moved.”

By a vote of 68-29, the Senate last week passed a bipartisan bill updating FISA. The president as well as a number of Democrats and many Republicans in both the Senate and the House have indicated they can support the Senate bill.

House Republicans demanded the majority bring the Senate bill to the House floor, but House Democrats refused. In protest of letting this critical legislation expire, House Republicans pledged to stay in Washington during the upcoming recess to complete this bill; however; the majority instead chose to go home.

As Members of Congress return to their congressional districts this

week, terrorists will not stop plotting deadly attacks on our homeland. It is the responsibility of Congress to update the laws that govern our intelligence community.

We are a nation at war, and by allowing this legislation to expire, the Democratic majority has undermined the ability of our intelligence officials to protect us.

Our national security should not be sacrificed to scoring political points and headlines. It is in our national interest that Congress pass the bipartisan Senate legislation without further delay.

Alabama Gains Seat on Appropriations Committee

Late last week, I was appointed to serve on the House Appropriations Committee. The Republican Steering Committee selected me to fill the vacancy created when former U.S. Rep.

Roger Wicker (R-MS) was appointed to the Senate following the resignation of Senate Republican Whip Trent Lott (R-MS).

Naturally, I am extremely honored – and obviously deeply humbled – by the confidence the members of the Steering Committee demonstrated in me by appointing me to the Appropriations Committee.

This appointment means even more to me when you take into account the many outstanding colleagues the Steering Committee had from which to choose.

Just being considered along with colleagues like Tom Cole, Henry Brown, Dave Reichert, Marilyn Musgrave, Jeff Flake, and Mike Turner has been an honor in itself.

It is clear; the current earmark process has become a symbol of a broken Washington. I sought this seat on the Appropriations Committee because I believe the time for change and reform – especially of the appropriations process and the much scrutinized subject of earmarks – is now.

My first priority as a member of the committee will be to serve as a vigilant guardian of your tax dollars, helping to expose and eliminate wasteful or questionable spending.

Towards that end, I have strongly supported the efforts of House Republican leadership to reform the current earmark process and eliminate wasteful spending.

I support Republican Leader Boehner's call for a moratorium on all earmarks while a bipartisan select committee identifies ways to eliminate pork barrel spending.

Quite frankly, Speaker Pelosi has the power to bring the current earmark process to an immediate halt. Until she does, I will use my seat on this committee to ensure there is full accountability and transparency on the Appropriations Committee in the spending decisions it makes.

By entrusting me with this position, the Steering Committee has charged me with helping to reform the earmark process and restoring fiscal credibility to Washington. I won't let them down, and I won't let the people of southwest Alabama down either.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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