

Congresswoman Matsui Urges Continued Bipartisanship for Intelligence Reauthorization

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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) advocated continued bipartisanship for the Intelligence Authorization bill (H.R. 5020) – an arena where partisanship should and usually does take a back seat. However, she questioned the injection of partisanship into our nation's intelligence effort by the Rules Committee. This legislation authorizes funding for the fifteen U.S. intelligence agencies and intelligence-related activities of the U.S. government.

During the Rules Committee consideration of the legislation, Congresswoman Matsui offered two amendments. Unfortunately, the bill is covered by a restrictive rule, which made only six of the 25 offered amendments in order. The first was a bipartisan amendment to require classified disclosure of the Administration's wiretapping program to all members of both the House and Senate Intelligence Committees. Additionally, this amendment would have clearly conveyed Congress's intent in passing the Iraq War Authorization and that it was in no way intended to authorize the Bush Administration's program to wiretap ordinary Americans as they go about their day-to-day lives.

“Often in DC – on the floor of this very institution – our founders are commended for their wisdom and thoughtfulness in crafting our Constitution. At the same time you can also hear Members bemoaning the increasing rarity of bipartisanship today. Yet its ironic the majority party would not allow a bipartisan amendment. It would have ensured that Congress fulfills its Constitutional oversight responsibility on the Administration's illegal wiretapping program,” stated Congresswoman Matsui. “I cannot understand why Congress would not choose to exercise our Constitutional powers.”

Congresswoman Matsui also cited the Constitution in offering a second amendment. “It is just as important to ensure the safety and security of the American people as it is to safeguard our civil liberties. These rights are a fundamental component of our Constitution – and are what make this nation unique among all others. For this reason the President should provide the financial resources for the Privacy and Civil Liberties Board, created after the attacks of September 11th. As a nation we should be equally committed to both.”

The Civil Liberties Oversight Board was created by the (9/11) Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act and was designed to serve as a civil liberties `watchdog' as the American people grow increasingly concerned about the potential erosion of Constitutional rights following September 11th. Fifteen months later, the Board is barely up and running. The President did not nominate the members of the Board for 9 months, and the Senate took five months to confirm the Chair and Vice Chair. In addition, the Administration's budget request did not include a request for funds for the Board in fiscal year 2007.

This amendment would have required dedicated funding for the Civil Liberties Oversight Board in the President's annual budget submission to Congress, and to authorize \$3 million annually for the Board's activities.

The House is expected to pass this legislation today.

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