

law was written. Technologies like the disposable cell phone or the Internet eliminated many of the differences. So one of the consequences of the way the law was originally drafted is that when technology changed, legal protections meant only for the people in the United States began applying to terrorists on foreign soil. As a result, our intelligence professionals reported that they were missing a significant amount of real-time intelligence needed to protect the American people. So earlier this year, Director McConnell sent Congress legislation to fix the problem.

In August, a bipartisan majority in Congress passed the Protect America Act. This law has helped close a critical intelligence gap, allowing us to collect important foreign intelligence and information about terrorist plots. The problem is, the law expires on February 1st—that's 135 days from today. The threat from Al Qaida is not going to expire in 135 days.

So I call on Congress to make the Protect America Act permanent. The need for action is clear. Director McConnell has warned that unless the FISA reforms in the Act are made permanent, our national security professionals will lose critical tools they need to protect our country. Without these tools, it'll be harder to figure out what our enemies are doing to train, recruit, and infiltrate operatives into America. Without these tools, our country will be much more vulnerable to attack.

Unfortunately, some in Congress now want to restrict the tools. These restrictions would impede the flow of information that helps us protect our people. These restrictions would reopen gaps in our intelligence that we had just closed. As I did in August, in evaluating any FISA bill, I will ask Director McConnell whether the legislation gives him what he needs to protect our Nation. The question I'm going to ask is, do our professionals have the tools necessary to do the job to protect the American people from further attack?

In addition to making the Protection America Act permanent, I urge Congress to take up other critical proposals included in the comprehensive FISA reform my administration submitted last April. It's particularly

important for Congress to provide meaningful liability protection to those companies now facing multibillion dollar lawsuits only because they are believed to have assisted in efforts to defend our Nation following the 9/11 attacks. Additionally, without this protection, state secrets could be revealed in connection with those lawsuits and our ability to protect our people would be weakened.

At stake in this debate is more than a piece of legislation. The decisions Congress makes will directly affect our ability to save American lives. I look forward to working with Congress to enact this legislation as quickly as possible, so that our intelligence officials will continue to have the tools they need to keep the American people safe. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Keith B. Alexander, USA, Director, National Security Agency.

**Statement on the Death of
Parliament Member Antoine
Ghanem of Lebanon**
September 19, 2007

I strongly condemn today's horrific assassination of Lebanese Member of Parliament Antoine Ghanem. I extend my personal condolences to his family and the families of the innocent persons who were murdered alongside him in Beirut.

Since October 2004, there has been a tragic pattern of political assassinations and attempted assassinations designed to silence those Lebanese who courageously defend their vision of an independent and democratic Lebanon. Today's cowardly attack comes days before the Lebanese Parliament is scheduled to convene to elect a new President. The United States opposes any attempts to intimidate the Lebanese people as they seek to exercise their democratic right to select a President without foreign interference. We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Lebanese people as they resist attempts by the Syrian and Iranian regimes and their allies to destabilize Lebanon and undermine its sovereignty.

I call on the international community to support the Government of Lebanon in its efforts to bring to justice the perpetrators of

these violent attacks and to stand with the citizens of Lebanon who continue to struggle to protect their freedom.

Remarks on the Resignation of Mike Johanns as Secretary of Agriculture

September 20, 2007

President Bush. Good morning. Mike Johanns has informed me that he plans to return home to Nebraska, which means that his service as Secretary of Agriculture must come to an end. Mike has been an outstanding member of my Cabinet. I knew he would be when I asked him to become the Secretary of Agriculture. I've known him for a long time. I've admired the fact that he is not only a decent person and an honest person, but he's a person who can get some things done.

So I accepted his resignation, and Laura and I bid Mike and Stephanie a warm farewell. And I thank him from the bottom of my heart for leaving a State he loves to come here to Washington, DC, to work in an—to work as the Secretary of Agriculture. You know, Mike brought with him a lot of practical farm experience. After all, he was the proud son of a dairy farmer. He understands the importance of the land. He worked tirelessly on behalf of farmers and ranchers.

And Mike Johanns did an outstanding job as the Secretary of Agriculture. He brought focus and energy to the Department. He was a champion of renewable fuels. He expanded the Department's commitment to conservation. He worked endlessly to open up foreign markets for American beef. He provided timely assistance to farmers and ranchers devastated by natural disasters. I couldn't have asked for a better Secretary of Agriculture.

He worked hard to put in motion a good farm bill. I remember when Mike came here to the Oval, he said to me, he said, "What I'm going to do is, I'm going to travel the country and reach out to the stakeholders to lay the foundation for farm legislation." And that's exactly what he did. And I got feedback from all around America that Mike Johanns listened. He wisely shepherded the process in such a way that we've got a good farm

bill in front of the Congress. He set the framework for success, and I'm confident we can get a good bill passed.

So I want to thank you for your good work getting this teed up.

Secretary Johanns. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. He's got a good team over at the Secretary of—at the Department of Agriculture. In other words, Mike understands that you've got to surround yourself with good folks. And so I feel very comfortable asking Chuck Connor, the Deputy Secretary, to serve as the Acting Secretary. And I want to thank Chuck for his good work.

Mike came by the White House here a couple of days ago, and he asked for my advice—and I appreciate it. Everybody likes to have their counsel sought. And during the discussion, he told me he was interested in continuing to serve America, but in a different role. And I asked him if this was something he was seriously considering. In other words, sometimes you get these rumors out there in the political process where somebody feels like they've got to say, yes, I'm interested. But no question in my mind that Mike loves Nebraska, and he's serious about going home and possibly serving the Nation in a different capacity.

And my answer was—to Mike was, I support you, and I encourage you to follow your heart. If it's Mike's decision and Nebraska's choice, he would make an outstanding Member of the United States Senate. There is no doubt in my mind.

And so I want to thank you for your service; thank you for your friendship; thank you for your commitment to America's farmers and ranchers and our country. And Laura and I wish you all the very best.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:27 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Johanns.

The President's News Conference

September 20, 2007

The President. Good morning. In just 10 days, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP, is set to expire.