

Perino: Cut debate on intelligence act

by UPI

WASHINGTON - A Bush administration spokeswoman said Tuesday the U.S. Congress has had enough time to debate extending the Protect America Act. White House Press Secretary Dana Perino said the bill that won approval from the Senate Intelligence Committee is not perfect but will go a long way toward giving "our intelligence community" the certainty of long-term legislation so they can count on having critical tools.

The Protect America Act is a temporary measure updating the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. The Senate is divided about the immunity provision, turning back a Senate Judiciary Committee measure that didn't include immunity language. The intelligence panel version that hasn't reached the Senate floor includes the immunity provision. President George Bush last week signed a temporary extension of the legislation. It is set to expire Feb. 15. "Legislating by extension for our intelligence community is no way to run a counterintelligence program," Perino said. "One of the most important weapons you can have in this war against terrorists is intelligence and good information about what they are planning, how they are planning and how we can stop them," Perino said. She added: "It's been debated not just for the last six months, but for about a year and a half. So they have this legislation in front of them, a bipartisan package that was passed in the Senate committee by 13-2, which is quite remarkable given the partisan nature of Capitol Hill. So we think Feb. 15 is the hard and fast deadline that they need to meet."

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