

June 29, 2006 - Slaughter Blasts Republican Hypocrisy on Administration Leaks

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Slaughter Blasts Republican Hypocrisy on Administration Leaks

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today delivered a speech condemning the Republican hypocrisy inherent in H.Res. 895, a Republican bill authored in response to recent newspaper stories concerning a government surveillance program known as "SWIFT."

Excerpts from Rep. Slaughter's speech follow:

"Republicans have called the disclosure of the SWIFT anti-terrorist program a 'disgrace.' They have accused the newspaper that first wrote about it, the New York Times, of forcing its, quote, 'arrogant, elitist, left-wing agenda' on the rest of the country. M. Speaker, if all of this is true, then I have no choice but to conclude that our President himself is a disgraceful, arrogant, left-wing elitist. Mr. Bush, as well as numerous top-ranking members of his administration, has been proudly discussing their efforts to eliminate the finances of terrorists for five years."

"The end result is a Republican administration intentionally leaking a story, both publicly and privately, and then punishing a newspaper for reporting on its leaks."

"The bill before us claims to stand against leaks - but it comes six years into an Administration that has always been willing to leak even the most sensitive information if it thought it would benefit from it politically."

"It is the height of irony to think that when the Bush Administration sought to silence critics of its pre-Iraq war intelligence claims, it chose to leak the classified identity of a CIA agent, as well as previously classified components of a national security estimate, to - of all newspapers - the New York Times. But it did so. And it did so willingly."

"The Republican outrage we are seeing today stinks to high heaven because the leak of Valerie Plame's identity last year came from on high - from the highest ranks of this White House."

"When all of the contradictions inherent in this bill are laid bare, we can see what it is actually about: Republicans need to change the subject of the real debate everyday people are having in this country."

"Republicans are interested only in inventing enemies to point fingers at and turn the public against. And to do so, M. Speaker, they are willing to jeopardize even our most basic and fundamental principals."

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, are included below:

M. Speaker,

For all those who will in future years look back on the vote we take today as a window into the soul of this Congress; for all those who will see the approval or defeat of this bill as a testament to how committed this body was to the ideals from which our nation draws its strength; for them, let me be very clear. On this day, the Republican Majority shamelessly played politics with our most cherished principals.

From the very beginning, this resolution, and this so-called debate, has been about one thing, and one thing only: election politics. Six months before our mid-term elections, Republicans are falling back on the one play that has worked for them, time and again. They are sowing fear in the hearts of the American people, and labeling any individual or organization that doesn't take its marching orders from the White House as a threat to our nation.

Think of what we have heard from leading Republicans over the past few days:

They have called the disclosure of the SWIFT anti-terrorist program a "disgrace." They have accused the newspaper that first wrote about it, the New York Times, of forcing its, quote, "arrogant, elitist, left-wing agenda" on the rest of the country. M. Speaker, if all of this is true, then I have no choice but to conclude that our President himself is a disgraceful, arrogant, left-wing elitist.

Mr. Bush, as well as numerous top-ranking members of his administration, has been proudly discussing their efforts to eliminate the finances of terrorists for five years. Not two weeks after September 11th, 2001, President Bush told the world that the United States had, and I quote, "launched a strike on the financial foundation of the global terror network," end quote. Such claims have been made time and again, not just by the President, but by every top Republican official in power. What is more, no fewer than 20 former and current administration officials spoke to New York Times reporters about the SWIFT program. The article that started this all couldn't have been written without their active help.

What the New York Times did - as well as the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, and newspapers throughout the country - was to publish a story which had, in effect, already been published a thousand times over by the White House itself. The end result is a Republican administration intentionally leaking a story, both publicly and privately, and then punishing a newspaper for reporting on its leaks. In such a context, the notion that one of our newspapers violated our national security last week is simply ludicrous on its face.

Think of this degree of Republican hypocrisy, and then consider this:

The bill before us claims to stand against leaks - but it comes six years into an Administration that has always been willing to leak even the most sensitive information if it thought it would benefit from it politically.

It is the height of irony to think that when the Bush Administration sought to silence critics of its pre-Iraq war intelligence claims, it chose to leak the classified identity of a CIA agent, as well as previously classified components of a national security estimate, to - of all newspapers - the New York Times. But it did so. And it did so willingly.

Where were the resolutions of protest from this Majority during that scandal? Where was the outrage when a national security asset, as well as all of her contacts in the intelligence community, were put in danger? There was none - because Republicans had deemed that leak to be permissible - and profitable.

The Republican outrage we are seeing today stinks to high heaven because the leak of Valerie Plame's identity last year came from on high - from the highest ranks of this White House. When all of the contradictions inherent in this bill are laid bare, we can see what it is actually about: Republicans need to change the subject of the real debate everyday people are having in this country.

That debate is about the wisdom of the three-year, 400 billion dollar war in Iraq that is still claiming American lives to this day. It is about the numerous scandals of its own creation that this Majority is scrambling to explain away. It is about the fact that Republicans have been entirely unwilling to exercise any form of meaningful oversight over the programs implemented by Congress and the White House - with disastrous results for our nation. It is about the very direction America is going to take in the years ahead.

Democrats are eager to debate all of these issues. But Republicans, as we are seeing today, are interested only in inventing enemies to point fingers at and turn the public against. And to do so, M. Speaker, they are willing to jeopardize even our most basic and fundamental principals. They are willing, with this bill, and with what they have and will say on the Floor today, to make it the province of Congress to dictate to our cherished independent media what it can and cannot report about, and what it can and cannot say.

Blaming the messenger is nothing new in this country, M. Speaker. The first time a newspaper was punished by an elected official was in 1735, when a New York publisher wrote unflattering things about the Governor and was put in jail. It was only a few decades later that the Alien and Sedition Acts were passed by Congress to silence those who opposed American involvement in a war with France. But to today threaten retribution and legal action against virtually every news organization in this country simply to gain a few points in the polls? It is a debasement of this Congress, and a desecration of our nation's ideals.

M. Speaker, my friends on the other side of the aisle in the White House have a right to be worried about what lies ahead of them. But what they do not have the right to do is to politicize our national security. They do not have the right to hypocritically and arbitrarily decide when the nation has been endangered by a leak, and when a leak is entirely acceptable. And they most certainly do not have the right to reshape this Congress into a body concerned with, in truth, little more than political retribution against an equally arbitrary "enemies list."

The American people expect this Majority and this Administration to guard information, not punish newspapers for writing about it after it has already been officially revealed. They understand that at the end of the day, the job of protecting our national security falls on the shoulders of our elected officials - not just on journalists whose primary duty is to objectively report on the world around us. And our citizens expect this body to do more than what it is doing here today. They expect it to follow a higher calling. And they are right.

###