

President Backs Down on Plan to Restrict Classified Antiterror Data on Capitol Hill

By JEANNE CUMMINGS
And DAVID ROGERS

Staff Reporters of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON—President Bush retreated from a plan to severely restrict classified information about the antiterrorism effort from Capitol Hill lawmakers after encountering protests from House and Senate members.

The agreement was issued after a morning meeting between Mr. Bush and congressional leaders from both parties. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D., S.D.) said afterward he was "quite pleased with the understanding," which several lawmakers said will essentially mean a return to normal briefing schedules.

"It's important that members of Congress have information that they need to do their proper oversight activities," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

The showdown stems from a presidential memorandum Friday instructing the departments of Treasury, State, Defense and Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency, to limit briefings to eight lawmakers. They included the top Democratic and Republican Senate and House leaders and the chairmen and ranking minority members of the Intelligence committees.

The White House says the president was provoked by an incident last week after CIA officials briefed the Senate Intelligence panel. Information from the session subsequently was leaked to the Washington Post. The newspaper, however, decided against publishing the material.

The edict enraged lawmakers and provoked a delay in House Appropriations Committee action on the \$317 billion Pentagon-spending bill that includes the CIA bud-

get. The panel abruptly canceled a Tuesday night session, and Chairman Bill Young (R., Fla.) said he demanded an explanation from White House Chief of Staff Andy Card. Satisfied with the answer—that the administration never intended to freeze out the Appropriations Committee, which controls government spending—the panel gave the bill initial approval last night. "We are happy," Mr. Young said.

House members were particularly angry because they felt tarred by a disclosure that allegedly was committed by a member of the Senate. "We all share the president's frustration and anger about these leaks," said Rep. Tim Roemer (D., Ind.), a member of the House Select Committee on Intelligence. "However, it's one thing to come out guns blazing against the leakers; it's another thing to drop a nuclear weapon on the whole Congress."

House Republicans briefly considered launching an ethics probe, but decided it was up to the Senate to police its own members—if the breakdown occurred there.

There appeared to be little stomach for such a probe in the Senate. Sen. Judc Gregg of New Hampshire, who is part of the Senate GOP leadership, said he hadn't heard of any potential ethics complaint and thought the flap was "water over the dam."

Still, the White House is reserving the right to disclose less in the briefings and, in some cases, the administration may limit its presentations to the chairmen and ranking members of committees.