

# National News

## Longer Term for 9/11 Intelligence Inquiry

The Bush White House relented on Feb. 4 and granted an extension of the work of the Independent Commission investigating pre-9/11 intelligence lapses, until July. The two-month extension on the May 27 deadline was required primarily because the team, headed by Republican Tom Kean and Democrat Lee Hamilton, has been stonewalled by the White House itself on documents demanded by the committee. The White House had strenuously objected to the deadline being extended further into the election period, since the report is likely to be another blow to the credibility of the Administration.

Having just announced that a White House-appointed "independent investigation" into pre-invasion intelligence failures on Iraq, will be given a few leisurely years to do its probe, the Administration was compelled to grant a few extra months to the 9/11 team.

However, the White House is still not releasing the requested briefings, nor even the notes taken by members of the commission itself who were allowed to view the briefings.

## Ashcroft Stalls On Blocking Terror Group

A Jan. 21 letter from Republican Rep. Bob Ney to Attorney General John Ashcroft, asking him to block a fundraiser organized by the leader of the Mujahideen-E-Khalq (MEK) terrorist group, has not been answered, and Ashcroft did nothing to block the event from taking place on Jan. 24, under the cover of raising money for the earthquake victims in Bam, Iran. The terrorist group paid neo-conservative leader Richard Perle to speak at the Jan. 24 event. Perle claims that he had no idea it was related to the MEK.

The reason Ashcroft is protecting the MEK is two-fold: First, the group wants to overthrow the Iranian government, and has been used by the Pentagon Office of Special

Plans network to attempt to accelerate Iranian regime change; and second, Ashcroft was the recipient of funds from MEK networks in his Missouri U.S. Senate campaign, at least in 1996.

Rep. Ney reminded Ashcroft that the MEK is banned in the United States and listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. The letter says, "I ask that you use all the resources available to investigate this Jan. 24 event and the Iranian-American Society of Northern Virginia [the new MEK front]. . . . The MEK has killed United States military and civilian personnel in the past . . . and targeted American civilians for murder. Under no circumstances should this terrorist organization be permitted to raise funds for its terrorist activities in our nation's capital."

## Demand Rehnquist Act On Cheney/Scalia Case

The ranking Democrats on the House Government Reform and Judiciary Committees wrote to Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist on Jan. 30, suggesting that the Supreme Court establish uniform standards for determining when a Supreme Court Justice should recuse himself from hearing a case due to the appearance of conflict of interest. The letter by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) cited the recent decision by Justice Antonin Scalia *not* to recuse himself from the case *In re: Cheney*, despite the fact that he and Cheney are close friends, and took a high-profile hunting vacation together in December.

The letter cited an Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals decision in the case *United States v. Tucker*, which evolved out of the Whitewater investigation. U.S. District Court Judge Henry Woods, a close friend of Bill and Hillary Clinton, dismissed a case against Gov. Jim Guy Tucker, brought by Independent Counsel Ken Starr. Starr went to the Appellate Court and won Judge Wood's recusal, on grounds of "appearance of conflict of interest."

Conyers and Waxman wrote to Rehnquist that the Scalia-Cheney relationship was a much clearer case of "appearance of

conflict of interest. . . . It is no exaggeration to say that the prestige and power of the Vice President are directly at stake in *In re: Cheney*," the two Congressmen wrote, noting that the case before Scalia centers on whether Cheney's energy task force can withhold the records of its deliberations, and, thereby, operate in total secrecy.

## Halliburton Warns On 'Cheney Factor'

Halliburton is warning investors that its connection to Vice President Cheney is a "risk factor," in its Jan. 23 filing of Form 8-K with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Halliburton listed "intense scrutiny" of its work in Iraq—because Cheney is a former chief executive officer—without mentioning that Cheney still has a financial interest through salary payments and owning stock options. "Since [Cheney's] nomination as Vice President, Halliburton has been and continues to be the focus of allegations," the filing stated. Some allegations "appear to be made for political reasons by political adversaries of the Vice President. . . . We expect that this focus and these allegations will continue and possibly intensify as the 2004 elections draw nearer."

Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal* on Feb. 2 reported that Halliburton is accused of overcharging more than \$16 million for meals at a single U.S. military base in Kuwait over January-July 2003, according to Pentagon investigators auditing the company's food-catering work to U.S. troops. The Pentagon has widened its audit of Halliburton's Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR) food services, to include more than 50 other military cafeterias in Kuwait and Iraq, according to an e-mail "alert" sent on Jan. 30 to more than a dozen U.S. Army contracting officials.

Halliburton agreed to repay the U.S. Army at least \$27.4 million for overbilling meals served to troops at five bases in Iraq and Kuwait. Army auditors are probing "all activities" by KBR.

Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), a member of the Senate Government Reform Committee, demanded that Halliburton be "reined in" by the Bush Administration.