

The New York Times

House Assails Media on Disclosing the Tracking of Finances

By **CARL HULSE**
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The House of Representatives on Thursday condemned the recent disclosure of a classified program to track financial transactions and called on the media to cooperate in keeping such efforts secret.

Lawmakers expressed their sentiment through a resolution that was approved on a largely party-line 227-to-183 vote after days of harsh criticism by the Bush administration and Congressional Republicans aimed at The New York Times and other newspapers for publishing details of the program, which the government said was limited to following possible terrorist financial trails.

The vote followed a bitter debate in which Republicans said news accounts had jeopardized the effort, and Democrats accused Republicans of trying to intimidate the press.

Republicans criticized news organizations, and The Times in particular, saying they had not considered the potential damage of revealing the program. "The recent front-page story in the aforementioned New York Times cut the legs out from under this program," said the resolution's author, Representative Michael G. Oxley, Republican of Ohio. "Now the terrorists will be driven further underground."

Mr. Oxley and other Republicans said The Times deserved particular scorn as the first to make public the details of the administration's effort to try to identify and apprehend terrorists by tracing financial transactions processed through an international cooperative called Swift. The Los Angeles Times and The Wall Street Journal published similar accounts soon after The Times. "If you are Al Qaeda, the appropriate response to this publication is, 'Thank you,'" said Representative Spencer Bacchus, Republican of Alabama.

Democrats accused Republicans of engaging in media-bashing for political gain while practicing selective outrage since, they said, Republicans stayed largely silent on the White House disclosure of the identity of the C.I.A. operative Valerie Wilson. They also said the administration had repeatedly disclosed its determination to track money for terrorists.

"We are here today because there hasn't been enough red meat thrown at the Republican base just before the Fourth of July recess," said Representative Jim McGovern, Democrat of Massachusetts.

The House vote followed denunciations by President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney of the disclosure, a request for prosecution of the sources of the article and Times employees and calls to revoke their press credentials.

The Republican-written resolution did not identify any publication by name. But many of the resolution's backers said The Times had acted irresponsibly.

Representative David Dreier, Republican of California, said The Times had led other news outlets in deciding to publish classified material. He dismissed arguments that the disclosure served a public interest, saying the public would rather be safe from terrorists than "all-knowing" about antiterror efforts.

Bill Keller, executive editor of The Times, disputed the idea that the had paper acted cavalierly in its decision to reveal the program.

"If the members who voted for the resolution believe the press is insensitive to the risks of reporting on intelligence programs, they could not be more wrong," he said in a statement. "We take those risks very, very seriously." He said the paper had agreed in the past to withhold information when lives were at stake.

"However, the administration simply did not make a convincing case that describing our efforts to monitor international banking presented such a danger," he said. "Indeed, the administration itself has talked publicly and repeatedly about its successes in the area of financial surveillance."

Democrats complained that Republicans refused to allow a vote on a Democratic alternative, which supported tracking terror financing and raised concern about leaks of classified material, including the "names of clandestine service officers of the Central Intelligence Agency," a clear reference to the Valerie Wilson case.

Democrats said the Republican proposal made assertions about the antiterror effort that could not be known since Congress had conducted little or no oversight of it. The resolution declared that it "has been conducted in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations and executive orders, that appropriate safeguards and reviews have been instituted to protect individual liberties and that Congress has been appropriately informed and consulted."

The resolution said the House "expects the cooperation of all news media organizations in protecting the lives of Americans and the capability of the government to identify, disrupt and capture terrorists by not disclosing classified intelligence programs."

Representative John D. Dingell, Democrat of Michigan, said Republicans were trying to stifle criticism of the administration, which he described as the most deceitful he had seen in his 50 years in Congress. Others said the administration was promoting democracy abroad while challenging a free press at home. "If anyone wants to live in a society where journalists are thrown in prison, I encourage them to move to Cuba, China or North Korea to see if they feel safer," said Representative Jane Harman, a California Democrat.