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## Mike McConnell's top worry: Iran getting nukes

BY BEN SZOBODY • STAFF WRITER • MARCH 28, 2008

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Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell told GreenvilleOnline.com this afternoon that passage of a controversial surveillance bill with three key provisions is crucial because a "significant, some would even say majority" portion of what the U.S. knows about terrorists comes from listening to their communication.

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He said the bill, called the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, extends the protection of U.S. citizens, and called allegations that the government is spying on Americans "patently untrue."

"It isn't giving up anything," he said. "It's modernizing the bill to reflect the technology of this age."

McConnell said the three vital provisions include the ability to conduct surveillance against foreign targets without a warrant, regardless of where the communication is intercepted, the requirement of a warrant when U.S. citizens are involved anywhere in the world and liability protection for telecommunications companies that have cooperated since 9-11.

He said warrants have not always been required to eavesdrop on U.S. citizens abroad.

"I could argue it's more protection, not less," McConnell said.

Earlier today, nation's top spy urged a Furman University audience to consider a life of public service, providing an overview of his path from a Greenville childhood and publicly defending the FISA bill.

He told a crowd of several hundred that the U.S. House version of the bill would cause "severe operational impact on my community," and noted debate in Congress resumes Monday.

McConnell told stories about former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State Colin Powell, the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Bush and also confirmed a story that he started his education at Furman sleeping in a gym closet because of a money shortage.

As head of 16 intelligence agencies, McConnell briefs the president at 7:30 a.m. daily. He oversees more than 100,000 people and a \$45 billion budget.

"My biggest worry at the moment: nuclear weapons in Iran," McConnell said, adding that if Iran acquired such a weapon it would set off a "nuclear arms race," changing the Middle East "overnight."

McConnell listed access to energy as one of the most serious problems facing the country.



GEORGE GARDNER / Staff

U.S. director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell speaks during a presentation at the Furman University Center Friday, March 28, 2008. McConnell, a Furman graduate, spoke to a group of Furman students and guests.

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