

Walter Pincus Post 10/9/75

Congressional Response To the CIA Budget

On September 25, at a closed meeting of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, members voted 30 to 19 not to receive CIA and other intelligence agency budget figures. As a result, the full committee accepted without discussion a subcommittee recommendation for a cut of \$263.2 million in intelligence activities next year without knowing what the overall spending of CIA and other agencies would be or what operations would be curtailed by the cuts.

Rep. Robert Giaimo (D-Conn), a member of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee that looked into intelligence

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agency spending, wanted the full committee in its closed sessions to discuss the CIA budget. According to Giaimo, Appropriations Committee Chairman George Mahon (D-Texas) told him at the September 25 session he could not mention intelligence figures to fellow committee members. "We then had a long discussion in secret," Giaimo said Monday, "with (Chairman) Mahon blocking from discussion the secret budgets of intelligence agencies."

Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.) finally requested a vote by the committee members on whether the CIA budget could be disclosed then and there at the closed hearing. It lost. For Giaimo, the committee's action was indicative that, despite recent public disclosures, "these guys in the House just don't want to know" about intelligence activities.

Another sign to Giaimo that House members are uninterested in the details of intelligence is that "not too many" of his colleagues took the time to review the secret subcommittee testimony on CIA and other intelligence agency budgets once they had been made available by Mahon.

Mahon first made the offer to his own committee members at the September 25 meeting, then repeated it on the House floor five days later during the first day of debate on the defense appropriations bill.

To see the classified intelligence hearings and budgets, a Congressman had to sign for the material and refrain from taking notes. He also had to agree to disclose it only to "authorized people."

On October 1, Giaimo sponsored an amendment on the House floor that would have led to public disclosure of the CIA budget. It lost 147 to 267. The large vote against disclosure was attributed to Mahon's offer to individual members to look at the figure.

However, few members had walked from the House chamber across the hall to the Appropriations committee offices to review the material. For some who did not go it was the secrecy pledge rather than a disinclination to know the facts.

Giaimo concedes a slow move toward greater disclosure—and perhaps increased Congressional oversight—is taking place. This was the first year the defense appropriations subcommittee, on which he serves, ever held hearings on intelligence spending. The directors of CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency, plus other officials were questioned. In past years, only Mahon and a few ranking committee members reviewed intelligence budgets. This year, also for the first time, a detailed written understanding between the subcommittee and the intelligence community was drafted on the use of the approved funds.

Mahon also has set up a task force, chaired by Rep. Neal Smith (D-Iowa) to work out new rules governing distribution in the future of CIA and other classified intelligence material and testimony presented to the appropriations committee. Giaimo is on that task force.

With these steps, however, Giaimo and other leaders in the intelligence investigation, including Chairman Otis Pike (D-N.Y.) of the House Intelligence Committee, remain skeptical that as of today the House leadership and a majority of its members are interested in intelligence oversight.

As one of the advocates of investigation put it Monday, "When the hell did the House ever assume its responsibilities willingly without being pushed."