

February 2, 2004

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

We commend you for recognizing the need for an independent commission to examine intelligence about Iraq. But we believe you would be making a serious mistake if you were to establish this commission by executive order and personally appoint the members to head the commission.

Your former chief weapons inspector David Kay stated last week that the Administration's prewar intelligence on Iraq was "all wrong." Other nonpartisan experts have reached similar conclusions about our intelligence and have also raised concerns about the accuracy of the Administration statements on this issue. Given these findings, a broad, thorough, nonpartisan review of both the intelligence community's assessments of the threats posed by Iraq and the Administration's use of this information is essential to restoring the trust of the American public and international community in the Administration and our intelligence system.

While we support the need for an independent commission, this commission should not be one whose members are appointed by and report to the White House. One of the major questions that needs to be addressed is whether senior Administration officials, including members of the Cabinet and senior White House officials, misled the Congress and the public about the nature of the threat from Iraq. Even some of your own statements and those of Vice President Cheney need independent scrutiny. A commission appointed and controlled by the White House will not have the independence or credibility necessary to investigate these issues.

Some have suggested that the Warren Commission, which investigated the assassination of President Kennedy, and the Pearl Harbor Commission, which investigated the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, are precedents for a presidentially appointed commission on Iraq intelligence. The Warren Commission, however, was not investigating allegations of potential misconduct involving senior administration officials, including White House officials. And the conclusions of the Pearl Harbor Commission had little credibility with the public, leading Congress to appoint a joint committee to conduct a new investigation.

For these reasons, we urge you to call upon Congress to enact a truly independent commission to examine the collection, analysis, dissemination and use by policymakers of intelligence on Iraq. This commission should be given unrestricted access to all relevant information and its members should be appointed on a bipartisan basis by the congressional leadership.

Sincerely,

Senator Tom Daschle
Representative Nancy Pelosi
Senator John D. Rockefeller IV
Representative Henry A. Waxman
Senator Joseph I. Lieberman