



Group Chides Congress on Whistleblowers

January 26, 2005 Wednesday

By Pauline Jelinek

Congress is not doing its job of protecting government whistleblowers, nor investigating the national security weaknesses those employees have tried to expose, several private watchdog groups said Wednesday.

They called for hearings into a particular case, that of linguist Sibel Edmonds, fired in 2002 after alleging shoddy work and possible espionage inside the FBI's translator program.

"The time has come for Congress to hold hearings and address the concerns raised by Ms. Edmonds," said Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight. "Without congressional oversight, the FBI will continue to hide its failures and quash whistleblowers."

Brian spoke at a joint press conference with the American Civil Liberties Union, family members of victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and some dozen whistleblowers who have spoken out about alleged problems at the Federal Aviation Administration, CIA, FBI and customs agency.

"The government is taking extreme steps to shield itself from political embarrassment while gambling with our safety," said Ann Beeson, an ACLU legal counsel. She named the firing of whistleblowers, retroactive classification of public information and other actions she said were taken "not to protect us but to cover up mistakes."

The Justice Department's inspector general said this month that the FBI never adequately investigated Edmonds' complaints, even though evidence and witnesses supported her.

Edmonds said that for two years she tried to work through Congress and refrained from going public because "I thought the system was going to work ... thought these people were going to do their jobs." But one lawmaker told her he didn't want to "get involved" and another said that it was "too messy," she said.

Congress should look into the Justice Department's mishandling of the case, Beeson said.

Group Chides Congress on Whistleblowers continued....

And it should get back to work on legislation to strengthen oversight of security agencies, including measures that were in a Senate version of the recent intelligence reform bill but were "removed, watered down," said whistleblower Mike German.

German was an FBI agent who quit last year, saying he suffered retaliation for speaking out about what he said were mistakes and corruption in a domestic terrorism case.

"We cannot waste time hiding mistakes and protecting egos," Brian said. "Limiting public disclosure and asserting secrecy in the name of security will not protect us."

On the Net:

Project on Government Oversight: www.pogo.org

ACLU: www.aclu.org

DOJ Inspector General: <http://www.usdoj.gov/oig>

Edmonds' Web site: <http://www.justacitizen.com>