



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy
Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery

Introduction of the *Protect the National Security Council from Political Interference Act of 2017*
February 1, 2017

Mr. Speaker:

Today I will introduce the *Protect the National Security Council from Political Interference Act*. I would like to thank my House colleagues who have signed on as original cosponsors of this legislation.

I worked at the Department of Defense, and am a member of the Armed Services Committee. I believe the most solemn responsibility of federal policymakers is to keep the American people safe, and to do so in a way that is faithful to the moral and ethical principles that have made this country exceptional and a force for good in a dangerous and unpredictable world.

Within the complex federal bureaucracy, the National Security Council is arguably the most important institution when it comes to debating and deciding issues related to homeland security, foreign policy, intelligence collection, and the national defense. Choices about whether to deploy men and women into combat are made during meetings of the NSC or its main sub-group, the Principles Committee. So, too, are decisions about how to defend the homeland against terrorism, and how to support our allies and counter our adversaries around the globe. The NSC's deliberations are so serious because the stakes are so high.

Since the creation of this body by Congress in 1947, presidents from Truman to Obama have prescribed the organizational structure and role of the NSC according to their personal preferences, within broad parameters set by Congress. That is how it should be. The NSC is a policy-making instrument, and the president is entitled to utilize this instrument in the manner that the president sees fit.

Historically, there has been a bipartisan consensus that NSC debates should be divorced from the world of electoral politics. Presidents of both parties have sought to establish an NSC policymaking process that is not contaminated, or perceived as contaminated, by political considerations.

Josh Bolten, chief of staff to President George W. Bush, may have put it best. Explaining why President Bush excluded political counselor Karl Rove from all NSC meetings, Bolten observed as follows:

“[T]he President . . . knew that the signal he wanted to send to the rest of his administration, the signal he wanted to send to the public, and the signal he especially wanted to send to the military is that the decisions I’m making that involve life and death for the people in uniform will not be tainted by any political decisions.”

I am filing this bill because I believe that President Trump’s directive organizing the NSC breaks from this longstanding, bipartisan tradition of constructing a wall to separate national security policymaking from domestic politics to the greatest extent possible.

Specifically, the president’s directive authorizes the “Assistant to the President and Chief Strategist”—Stephen Bannon—to be a permanent member of the NSC and to attend all NSC and Principals Committee meetings. Mr. Bannon’s role in the administration has a strong political component. Indeed, it appears unprecedented for a political counselor so deeply enmeshed in domestic politics to serve as a permanent member of the NSC. Senator John McCain, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, described Mr. Bannon’s appointment as a “radical departure from any National Security Council in history.”

Therefore, my bill will amend federal law to ensure that no individual whose “primary or predominant responsibility is political in nature” shall be designated as a member of the NSC or be authorized to regularly attend meetings of the NSC or Principals Committee. This language would apply to Democratic presidents and Republican presidents alike. Our men and women in uniform, our intelligence and homeland security professionals, and our citizens should feel secure in their knowledge that the critical decisions made by the NSC are free of political calculation. The American people deserve a national security policymaking process that inspires confidence, not cynicism.

My bill also contains a second provision. The president’s directive prescribes a diminished role on the Principals Committee for the Director of National Intelligence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The directive limits their attendance to only those meetings “where issues pertaining to their responsibilities and expertise are to be discussed.”

This language is not unprecedented, but it has caused concern among experts of all political stripes, particularly when it is juxtaposed against the decision to give Mr. Bannon unfettered access to NSC and Principals Committee meetings. Accordingly, my bill would express the view of Congress that the DNI and the Chairman of the Joints Chiefs, given their importance to national security, should have a standing invitation to attend all Principals Committee meetings.

I invite my colleagues to support this legislation, which seeks to protect the NSC from political interference and to ensure that the president receives the best possible advice from his national security experts—experts who will recommend actions because they are in the best interests of the American people and not because they are politically expedient.

I yield back the balance of my time.