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BY STEVE GERSTEL

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- SEN. BARRY GOLDWATER, THE NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE, SAID THURSDAY THE UNITED STATES PROBABLY RANKS ON A PAR WITH ANY OTHER NATION IN GATHERING INTELLIGENCE -- BUT NOT IN ASSESSING OR UNDERSTANDING IT.

GOLDWATER, R-ARIZ., SAID THE WEAKNESS WAS TRACEABLE TO THE PERIOD WHEN THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY -- NOTABLY THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY -- CAME UNDER HEAVY SCRUTINY AND CRITICISM.

DURING THAT ERA, GOLDWATER SAID, MANY SENIOR PEOPLE WITH THE EXPERIENCE TO ANALYZE INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION LEFT AND ONLY NOW ARE THE CIA AND THE OTHER INTELLIGENCE GROUPS BEGINNING TO ATTRACT RECRUITS TO REPLACE THEM.

"I THINK I CAN SAFELY REPORT THAT INTELLIGENCE GATHERING IN THIS COUNTRY IS PROBABLY ON A PAR WITH ANY OTHER COUNTRY, THAT INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT IS NOT ON A PAR WITH ANY OTHER COUNTRY AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF ASSESSMENTS OF INTELLIGENCE IS NOT ON PAR WITH ANY OTHER COUNTRY," GOLDWATER SAID.

GOLDWATER SPOKE BRIEFLY BEFORE THE SENATE CONFIRMED BY A VOTE OF 94-0 THE NOMINATION OF ADM. BOBBY R. INMAN AS DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE CIA AND APPROVED HIS PROMOTION FROM VICE ADMIRAL TO ADMIRAL ON A VOICE VOTE.

INMAN, 49, WHO SERVED THE LAST FOUR YEARS AS DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY, WAS RECOMMENDED TO NEW CIA DIRECTOR WILLIAM CASEY BY THE SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE.

GOLDWATER CALLED INMAN "THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE RIGHT JOB AT THE RIGHT TIME."

"THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY HAS GONE THROUGH SOME VERY TRYING TIMES IN THE LAST 10 YEARS," GOLDWATER SAID. "THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, IN PARTICULAR, CAME UNDER GREAT CRITICISM DURING THE DAYS OF THE SO-CALLED CHURCH COMMITTEE TO THE END THAT WE LOST MANY OF OUR SENIOR PEOPLE.

"LOSING SENIOR PEOPLE IN INTELLIGENCE IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE THESE MEN AND WOMEN HAVE REACHED THE POINT OF EXPERIENCE AT WHICH THEY ARE ABLE TO ASSESS THE INTELLIGENCE WE GATHER," HE SAID.

BUT, HE SAID, "WE ARE NOW RECEIVING MANY APPLICATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO WORK IN INTELLIGENCE AND IF THIS CONTINUES, WE WILL BE ABLE TO REBUILD THE OLDER GROUP WHO DID THE ASSESSING."

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