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The Washington Times

Calls for scrutiny of FBI increase

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Jerry Seper THE WASHINGTON TIMES

1 Congressional leaders, concerned about mounting problems at the FBI and what they call a growing lack of public confidence in the bureau, have issued a bipartisan call for renewed scrutiny of the federal law enforcement agency.

Both Republicans and Democrats are suggesting outside commissioners and new internal watchdogs to oversee the beleaguered agency.

2 Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., Wisconsin Republican and chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, wants a deputy inspector general named to oversee only the FBI. He said he is worried the bureau "has lost its way."

3 "Like a slugger who has lost his swing, I think it is time for this new administration to focus on fundamentals. If the department can't get the basics right, the American people will inevitably lose confidence in it - one of our most trusted institutions," he said.

4 Sen. Patrick J. Leahy, Vermont Democrat and chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has begun a round of public hearings to focus solely on the FBI, including an intense review of the bureau's internal security safeguards.

5 "Unfortunately, the image of the FBI in the minds of too many Americans is that this agency has become unmanageable, unaccountable and unreliable," said Mr. Leahy.

6 Sens. Orrin G. Hatch, Utah Republican, and Charles E. Schumer, New York Democrat, both members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, have announced pending legislation that would create a blue-ribbon commission of nongovernmental specialists to review the FBI and make recommendations for improvements.

7 They believe many Americans are concerned that if the FBI can make errors in high-profile cases, the agency also may be making mistakes on cases with less scrutiny.

8 "If there were mistakes on high-profile cases, where there should have been extra care, what is going on with the lower-profile cases?" Mr. Schumer

asked.

The **FBI** has come under intense criticism over the past several months in a wake of a series of missteps, including its failure to turn over 4,000 pages of documents in the Timothy McVeigh case as required by a court order. The bureau also saw one of its own, Robert P. Hanssen, a 27-year veteran agent, arrested on espionage charges and had to acknowledge he worked in its counterintelligence division during the 15-year period he is accused of stealing U.S. secrets.

The bureau also was criticized for its handling of the investigation of former Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee, who initially was identified as a spying suspect but eventually pleaded guilty to one of 59 counts charged in a December 1998 indictment in a plea agreement with the Justice Department.

Just this week, the **FBI** arrested one of its own security specialists on charges of selling classified files to organized crime figures and others under investigation.

Three separate investigations of the **FBI** are under way: one announced this week by Attorney General John Ashcroft involving a **management** review of the bureau by a team of department officials headed by Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson; another by the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General; and a third by former **FBI** and CIA Director William Webster.

Mr. Sensenbrenner's proposal to create a deputy inspector general to review only the **FBI** met with support from the House Judiciary Committee, including its ranking Democrat, John Conyers Jr. of Michigan. The proposed legislation also would authorize a \$10 million increase - to \$55 million - in the Bush administration's 2002 budget request for the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General.

"This legislation signifies a major step forward in our effort to improve the operations of the **FBI**," said Mr. Sensenbrenner. "Oversight is a priority and this level of funding should get the IG back on the path of meeting the audit and oversight needs of the department."

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