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Schiff Bill Would Tighten Guantanamo Detainee Rules

Lisa Friedman
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WASHINGTON -- Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena, introduced legislation Wednesday that would force the U.S. government to formally charge Guantanamo Bay detainees within two years or, except in extraordinary cases, release the prisoners.

Noting that many of the detainees captured in Afghanistan in 2001 have yet to be charged, Schiff said Congress needs to develop a policy for the "swift and just processing of those detained."

His bill comes on the heels of a request by Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, and other Democrats to establish an independent commission to investigate alleged abuses at Guantanamo as well as U.S.-run prisons in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Schiff's bill also would give the executive branch authority to detain foreign nationals as unlawful combatants; provide detainees with a timely hearing before an independent military officer to challenge their designation as an unlawful combatant; and establish tribunals to address a detainee's formal charges.

In cases where a detainee is not charged within two years, the Schiff bill would demand release or repatriation unless the secretary of state certifies "extraordinary circumstances" requiring additional time.