

Congresswoman Matsui Offers Amendment to Hold Department of Homeland Security Accountable for the

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for the UASI Grant Program

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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) offered an amendment to the fiscal year 2007 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations bill to hold them accountable for revising the eligibility guidelines for the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program. In January DHS announced revised eligibility guidelines for the UASI grant program, because of which the Sacramento and San Diego regions may no longer be able to apply for these funds next year.

“This Amendment would withhold funding until DHS has properly addressed these issues. This would ensure accountability,” stated Congresswoman Matsui. “DHS has yet to provide a complete and total explanation for the decisions they made. Based on the minimal information I have received from DHS, the new guidelines seem to omit critical elements relating to our security needs. DHS has already acknowledged that it failed to take into account the catastrophic downstream impact to my district if there were an attack on Folsom Dam. This only heightens my concern that other critical infrastructure and threats may also have been overlooked.” During the floor consideration of the amendment a point of order was made by Representative Harold Rogers, Chairman of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee. Unfortunately, it was upheld on a technicality. For this amendment to have survived the point of order Congresswoman Matsui would have needed to provide documentation of DHS’s policy. To date DHS has only cited information verbally in briefings; they have refused to provide the policy details to Members of Congress.

Click here to see Congresswoman Matsui offer the amendment on the floor. Below is the text of her statement [as prepared for delivery]: “In January, the Department of Homeland Security made significant changes to our homeland security effort. They announced the areas eligible for Fiscal Year 2006 UASI grants. “For the first time, Sacramento and San Diego were not identified as high-risk areas. While Sacramento and San Diego did receive FY 06 funding, the new eligibility guidelines have put our funding for next year and beyond in jeopardy. “Sacramento is the capital of the 6th largest economy in the world and home to dozens of critical federal and state government buildings.

Much of the state's water, electricity, and telecommunication systems are managed from Sacramento. Of considerable concern, is an attack on Sacramento's dams and levees. Not only because of the potential loss of life and impact to Sacramento's families. But an economic impact as well. According to a Sacramento Bee analysis, the economic impact for a major flood in Sacramento would cost the region \$35 billion. This is damage to homes, loss of jobs and government revenues. "The San Diego area contains the nation's 7th-largest city adjacent to a heavily trafficked international border, a busy port, and tourist attractions. Nor should it be overlooked that a number of Naval and Marine bases are located in San Diego. Including the largest Naval base in the country. With fewer installations after four rounds of BRAC, an attack on even one could result in an even greater impact. "An attack on either of these cities would have repercussions well-beyond our region. "Therefore, Congressman Filner and I have very real concerns about whether DHS's new eligibility guidelines accurately address our homeland security needs. "We all agree that a risk-based grant program is an effective use of our limited resources. However, policy is only as good as the information that goes into it. "DHS has already acknowledged that it failed to take into account the catastrophic downstream impact to my district if there were an attack on Folsom Dam. This only raises the question of what other targets have they overlooked? "That is why we need to ensure that DHS properly considers the catastrophic and cascading effects of an attack on critical infrastructure such as dams and levees. As well as determine a way to factor in the presence of drug trafficking and other organized crime activities that relate to terrorism and strategic defense considerations. "This Amendment would withhold funding until DHS has properly addressed these issues. It would ensure accountability. "It is important that DHS address these concerns. We need increased transparency and understanding of the process before the next UASI review is conducted. "Unfortunately, it is unlikely that a DHS reauthorization bill will come to the floor before the next risk assessment begins. As a result, we must take this opportunity to require DHS to perform a thorough threat assessment of each urban area. "We have an obligation to ensure we are meeting our national security needs. But the questions surrounding the UASI grant eligibility draw into question whether we are meeting that need." ###