

Comprehensive Appropriations Bill Passes U.S. Senate Rep. Doris Matsui Praises Inclusion of Protect

Comprehensive Appropriations Bill Passes U.S. Senate
Rep. Doris Matsui Praises Inclusion of Protections for Hmong Refugees

Printable Version (PDF)

Washington, D.C. – Today, Rep. Doris Matsui (CA-05) announced that the Senate passed a comprehensive spending package similar to one that was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives yesterday (H.R. 2764). In a major victory for the Hmong community in northern California and around the world, both the House- and Senate-passed versions of the legislation include a provision granting immediate relief to Hmong refugees who are currently barred from immigrating to the United States.

“I am pleased that we will soon lift the unfair restrictions which have kept the Hmong from coming to the United States in recent years. Not only have these people been strong and reliable partners in Southeast Asia for decades, but they play a very constructive and beneficial role in American society. In particular, Hmong refugees in Thailand face the very real threat of suffering human rights violations. It is our duty in this country to be vigilant international partners in making sure that they are protected,” said Rep. Matsui.

Under the 2001 anti-terrorism act, any member of a group that took up arms against any government is ineligible for refugee status or political asylum in the United States. This inadvertently includes the Hmong people in Laos and Thailand who assisted the United States during the Vietnam War. The House- and Senate-passed versions of the spending bill waive this prohibition for the Hmong, eliminating a significant hurdle that has kept many of them from joining their families in the United States.

“We must act now to make sure that Hmong refugees are not barred from seeking freedom here because of a poorly-worded and reactionary law. This legislation is an opportunity for us to be good international partners and champions of human rights,” said Rep. Matsui.

In addition to her strong support for the immigration provisions in H.R. 2764, Rep. Matsui sent a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice earlier this year that called on the State Department to address the plight of Hmong refugees in Thailand. Many of these Hmong refugees fought with the United States during the Vietnam War, but are now facing persecution if they are extradited back to Laos.

“We can and should intervene on the behalf of the Hmong in Thailand to ensure that their refugee status is assessed promptly and fairly. They run the risk of being repatriated to a country where they will assuredly be persecuted. We have a moral responsibility to step up and make sure that these people are protected,” said Rep. Matsui.

“Constructive action taken by the State Department on behalf of these refugees will help restore the United States’ reputation in the eyes of the international community and of those Hmong—both international and domestic—who fought and died for our cause during the Vietnam War,” Rep. Matsui wrote in that letter.

###