

Congresswoman Matsui's Statement on Homeland Security Authorization Bill

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Washington, DC - Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui spoke on the floor of the House of Representatives during today's debate on legislation authorizing the Department of Homeland Security. The Congresswoman's remarks (as prepared for delivery):

Mr. Speaker, I am truly pleased to stand before you today with a rule to permit the Homeland Security Authorization bill to come to the House floor.

First and foremost, I want to thank Chairman Thompson for his continued leadership on an issue of utmost importance for the safety and prosperity of the country, and for working so closely with Ranking Member King on this bill.

This bipartisan bill authorizes \$39.8 billion to the Department of Homeland Security to carry out its many functions, from securing our borders to providing our local law enforcement with resources to prepare and prevent terrorist attacks.

The Department of Homeland Security has a wide range of responsibilities. In recognition of its critical mission, I am pleased that the Homeland Security Committee has authorized \$2.1 billion more than the President requested in his Budget.

This Authorization bill does far more than simply authorize appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security, though. This bill gets at the heart of the management problems within the Department.

As we all know, the Department was created by combining the work of 22 separate agencies. This process of integration has had many challenges: poor communication between agencies, a lack of qualified management, and an unusually high turnover of senior personnel.

Congress has not made these challenges any easier, however.

We could have addressed some of these problems through the legislative process by passing an authorization bill last year. However, the prior Majority failed to do so, and so the Department's management problems went uncorrected.

Without addressing the underlying management and operational issues, the Department cannot perform its important

functions. In such an environment, how can the American people feel safe?

Thankfully, H.R. 1684 addresses these challenges.

It mandates a comprehensive review of the Department at the beginning of each new Administration in order to ensure that DHS is structured to meet the security needs of the American people.

It sets qualifications for senior managers, increases coordination between agencies, and boosts funds for the Inspector General. Through agency by agency, it puts in place thoughtful personnel policies to attract, train and keep only the most qualified personnel.

These reforms are important and I am glad that the Committee and Democratic Leadership have moved forward with a well-focused bill to improve the Department's management.

This bill continues the Majority's strong record on homeland security. In a few short months, this Congress has passed bills to implement the 9/11 Recommendations and to strengthen Rail and Public Transportation security - each with strong, bipartisan majorities.

Each is a component of a comprehensive approach to protecting our constituents from potential threats. I applaud the Committee and the Leadership for their consistent focus on homeland security throughout the year.

I understand that some Members have concerns that this bill does not address every issue, but part of the legislative process is working these issues through the Committees of jurisdiction.

It is important to keep in mind that Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member King put forth a bipartisan bill during mark-up, and Chairman Thompson continues to work with other committees of jurisdiction in order to make sure that every aspect of our nation's security is supported by Congress.

In particular, I applaud the Chairman's record of shepherding two major homeland security bills through the House already. I think we would all agree that today's effort, the third bill in five months, makes substantial improvements to longstanding management issues within DHS.

The rule and underlying bill shows the commitment of this Congress to working for a safe and secure America. So I urge all Members to support both the rule and the underlying bill.

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