

Mr. Sabo's Opening Statement
FY2005 Homeland Security Appropriations – Full Committee Markup
June 9, 2004

Mr. Chairman, first let me thank you for your hard work and for the hard work of staff in producing this mark.

As I said in Subcommittee, I believe that this bill falls seriously short in funding some critical areas.

The irresponsible House budget resolution forced the situation we're in with Homeland Security Appropriations for next year. This bill is better than the President's request, but it's still inadequate because of the 302(b) allocation.

In order to maintain the House leadership's budget fiction, the Chairman was forced to make trade-offs among programs to improve disaster preparedness and response, immigration services and programs to stop terrorists. As a result, we have some worrisome gaps.

The first responder cuts are one of my biggest concerns. Cuts in fire grants. Deep cuts in formula funds to most states. This bill is almost \$330 million below the '04 first responder levels. This funding has been falling since 2003. If these cuts hold, next year most states and localities will end up with less homeland security funding than they have today.

This bill comes two weeks after the American people saw live TV coverage of the Attorney General and the FBI director giving us alarming warnings of imminent terrorist attack. At their press conference, Mr. Ashcroft said that our own intelligence and al Qaeda's "public statements indicate that it is almost ready to attack the United States" -- and that they intend to hit us hard.

If terrorists attack us again -- our local police, firefighters and emergency workers will be the first on the scene. It frustrates me that there's no sense of urgency to ensure they have all the tools they need to do their jobs.

The first responder cuts, combined with the law enforcement grant funding cuts we expect in the Commerce-Justice bill, mean that this country will certainly be moving backward instead of forward in protecting the homeland.

There are also some homeland security issues not related to money that I'd like to raise.

I thank the Chairman for including my CAPPS II bill language. It updates last year's law requiring the Secretary to certify -- and GAO to review the certification -- that all eight security and privacy criteria are met before this passenger profiling system can be deployed. Earlier this year, GAO found that only one of these criteria had been met.

The new language also specifically calls for GAO to review the CAPPS II methodology that is intended to predict whether a passenger could be a terrorist.

Second, I'm troubled that the Administration continues to have such inadequate chemical plant security policies. For the most part, vulnerability assessments and security plans are left to the plant owners' conscience. I will offer an amendment on this later.

Third, cargo carried on passenger aircraft is still not inspected like the passenger baggage carried in the same hold. While the Chairman has sought to improve on the President's request, I don't believe the Subcommittee bill goes far enough to close this security gap.

Many other homeland security issues are not being addressed as quickly or as thoroughly as they should be -- from commercial truck security to intelligence coordination to stopping terrorist financing. And, the Administration continues to give important homeland security contracts to companies that locate offshore for tax purposes.

The Department of Homeland Security is still trying to get organized. It may take them many more years to become truly effective.

We may not have that much time to wait. If America is in imminent danger of attack by terrorists, we must do all we can to stop them. The role of the Congress should be to push the Department to make needed security improvements. The amendments I will offer today attempt to do that.

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