

Homeland Security Appropriations

June 13, 2007

Watch the speech

Mr. ALTMIRE. I can understand why there would be some confusion on the other side about why we would need to move these appropriations bills in a timely manner because, yes, the fiscal year starts October 1. So what is the urgency, I'm hearing.

I can understand why there is a lack of recognition of the urgency because in the 12 years, Mr. Chairman, that the Republican Party controlled this House, they were able to complete all the appropriations bills on time exactly zero times. They were unable to do it any time in the 12 years they controlled this House.

So, yes, I understand there is some confusion about the process and why it is important to get these bills out on time.

If anyone is interested, the last time that all the appropriations bills were completed on time was 1994, which perhaps, by coincidence, was the last time the Democrats controlled the process in this House. So we do understand the urgency of getting these bills done on time; and we do understand that October 1 is going to be here and we need to complete work on these bills.

Certainly, what has happened in the House the last couple of days, and I would expect is going to happen over the remaining course of the week, and perhaps months, does not bode well for our ability to do that because we are facing a lot of obstruction. I think it would be instructive to talk about what is actually in this bill rather than talk about the procedural gimmickry which is going on to prevent us from passing this bill.

The bipartisan Homeland Security Appropriations bill provides critical funding to improve the Nation's homeland security and implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, which have languished for more than 4 years now. One of the first things we did in the first hours of this House was to vote to implement the 9/11 Commission recommendations. This bill moves us in that direction; it enables us to do that with the funding that is required. I don't think that is something that should wait any longer. We have already waited 4 years from those recommendations. We have waited almost 6 years since 9/11 to see this take place.

This legislation strengthens border security. I hear a lot of talk about border security and immigration. This bill provides emergency first responders with additional training and equipment, and improves aviation and port security, all important

aspects of the 9/11 Commission recommendations.

We talk about immigration reform. This bill makes border security the top priority by devoting substantial resources to secure our borders not only against potential terrorists, but also to help stop the growing flood of illegal immigrants entering our country each and every day, totaling more than 12 million at this time.

In this bill, we invest in our Nation's most pressing security needs by hiring 3,000 additional border security agents. That's what we are talking about, we are going to secure the borders. We include \$1 billion for fencing. I think that is as important to people on the other side of the aisle as it is to people on our side of the aisle. I don't know why they're delaying this; that \$1 billion goes to fencing infrastructure and technology along the U.S.-Mexican border.

We commit \$2.1 billion to illegal immigrant detention and removal. We hear about this "catch and release" program as part of the immigration debate. This bill stakes a step in solving that problem. We are in the process of debating that. Let's get it done. Let's stop all the delaying tactics. Let's get this bill done.

This bill provides \$550 million in State homeland security grants which are used to hire, train, retain and equip emergency first responders. Is there anyone in this House who doesn't think that's an important priority that we should make a priority and get this bill through the legislative process?

This bill increases funding for firefighter assistance grants. Unfortunately, the President recommended a 55 percent reduction. We put that money back in because I don't know that we can come up with any more important segment of our society than our firefighters, the brave men and women who put their lives on the line every day here at home to keep us safe.

We improve aviation security by doubling the amount of cargo screening on passenger aircraft, another key recommendation of the 9/11 Commission. So these are not things that should be delayed.

We invest in port security by providing \$400 million in grants to improve critical port facilities and infrastructure. And this Homeland Security Appropriations bill includes strong oversight measures to ensure careful spending of taxpayer dollars. I want you all to hear that: It eliminates the wasteful, no-bid contracts that have led to billions of dollars in losses.

Mr. Chairman, what this bill does is give our brave men and women who respond to emergencies the tools and resources they need to protect our communities. I can think of no better way to show the American people that we are committed to this.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.