

WebMemo



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100-Hours Homeland Security Bill Not Ready for Prime Time

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The new House majority's H.R. 1, "Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007," may reach a floor vote today. The bill, a part of the new congressional majority's "100-Hours" agenda, does far less than its title implies. For the most part, its new measures are not terribly useful, and what is useful in the proposed law is not terribly new: a restatement of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations, a gloss on existing requirements and ongoing government initiatives and programs, and demands for more reporting. Rushing the bill to a vote without hearings or floor debate has resulted in a flawed proposal. To avoid damaging U.S. homeland security operations and wasting taxpayers' money, Congress should strip the most troubling provisions from this legislation.

More Checkbook Security

The House bill would limit the percentage of grants that, as a minimum, are assigned to each state by an inflexible formula. In itself, this is a positive proposal, and the House passed similar measures twice in the past under Republican leadership. This bill veers off-course, however, in establishing at least two new grant programs for emergency communications and creating "intelligence fusion centers." There is nothing wrong with federal assistance on these initiatives, but they can and should be funded out of existing homeland security grant programs, displacing wasteful and inefficient efforts that have done little to meet national priorities. Simply adding more grant pro-

grams is just throwing money at the problem and increases the risk that homeland security will become, as the 9/11 Commission warned, just more pork barrel spending.

More Feel-Good Security

To deter terrorists from exploiting international trade, the U.S. currently relies on counterterrorism and intelligence programs combined with risk assessments, random checks, and the inspection of suspicious high-risk cargo. The House bill would replace that system with one that mandates "strip searching" every package and container coming from overseas. The bill expects the private sector and foreign countries, as well as the U.S. government, to spend billions of dollars on these inspections even though they would likely be no more effective than current programs and, in fact, could be much more easily circumvented by terrorists. Diverting energy and resources into mass screening is a poor strategy that is likely to make Americans less, not more, safe.

More Checklist Security

In an effort to address the recommendations in the 9/11 Commission's report, the bill meddles in

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many already ongoing initiatives. In some cases, it would do more harm than good. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) offers a case in point. PSI is a voluntary, multi-national, bilateral program established by the Administration to combat the smuggling of dangerous and banned weapons, technologies, and materials. Incredibly, the bill proposes that PSI be approved by the United Nations. While the 9/11 Commission did propose that the U.S. seek greater international cooperation in the war on terrorism, it did not recommend that the U.S. and other free nations outsource their responsibilities to the U.N. or other international bodies. PSI is perfectly legitimate under existing U.S. laws and treaties and does not require U.N. sanction.

Back to the Drawing Board

The House's Homeland Security bill requires far more scrutiny from Congress. The most egregious measures—such as piling on more federal grants, adding mandatory inspections, and requiring U.N. sanctions—should be stripped from the measure. Meanwhile, Congress should take a hard look at the rest of the bill to ensure that it will actually help make America safe, free, and prosperous, as the 9/11 Commission intended in its recommendations.

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