

WebMemo



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Congress Can Honor 9/11 Anniversary by Doing the Right Thing

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As Congress returns to mark five years since the 9/11 attacks, there will be a concerted effort to pass homeland security-related bills to demonstrate that the Hill takes the demands of the long war seriously. At least three pieces of legislation—port security, chemical security, and FEMA reorganization—will be at the top of the list of measures considered. In their zeal to act, legislators must avoid compromises that will make America less safe, free, and prosperous.

Port Insanity

Congress should reject outright any port security legislation that includes provisions requiring 100 percent inspection of every container shipped to the United States. Mass inspection of the millions of containers shipped to U.S. shores is wildly impractical. The technologies reasonably available are not that good, and they would produce so much data that, by the time inspectors could look at the “fuzzy data,” customers would be buying the sneakers that came in a container from China. These worthless inspections would also add billions to the cost of shipping goods. Moreover, the inspections are designed to counter threats that can be addressed by measures (through good intelligence and counterterrorism operations) that are both more efficient and cost-effective.

Chemical Crazyiness

A chemical security bill that advances the agenda of environmental groups under the guise of homeland security is unacceptable. Legislation should not man-

date inherently “safer” technologies. Some chemical products are highly toxic, but mandating that these should be replaced with “safer” chemicals and methods is not appropriate for anti-terrorism legislation. Decisions on which chemicals are the most appropriate for industrial uses are based on a number of factors including safety, environmental and health risks, and industry and consumer needs—not matters that should be regulated under homeland security. Additionally, legislation should not impose criminal penalties. Criminal penalties are unnecessary and would overcriminalize federal regulatory codes. Civil penalties, appropriately enforced, are sufficient for chemical security.

FEMA Face-Saving

Moving FEMA out of Homeland Security or reorganizing the department, again, would be another disaster. The argument that FEMA was more effective as an independent agency is simply myth. Simply reorganizing the wiring diagram will not make for a more effective federal response, but it will consume a lot of time, energy, and resources. Reorganizing FEMA makes no sense, especially since the department has not had time to complete all the reforms it started just a year ago.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/homelanddefense/wm1209.cfm

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Winning the Long War

It is more important that Congress do the right thing than do something. The best way to remember the victims of 9/11 and demonstrate the national resolve to prevail is to have the discipline to undertake only measures that serve to make America safe, free, prosperous, and proud.

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