



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Markup Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Markup of: H.R. 4574, H.R. 6229, H.R. 7311, H.R. 8150, H.R. 8631, H.R. 8645, H.R. 8655, H.R. 8654, H.R. 8658, H.R. 8663, H.R. 8664, H.R. 8671, and H.R. 8662

June 12, 2024

Today, the Committee will consider many bipartisan measures that broadly impact the operations of the Department of Homeland Security.

However, it has been a long and winding road with plenty of potholes to get to this point, and I have been disheartened by the partisanship and obstruction that has undermined this markup. Advancing measures with bipartisan cosponsors that have been circulated or introduced months ago should not be a challenging exercise. And bills should not have to undergo an extreme MAGA purity test before they are considered by the Committee.

As long as Committee Republicans allow their most extreme Members to veto commonsense measures because of unrelated ideological concerns, the further this Committee strays from its proud tradition of putting politics aside for the benefit of the homeland and those who work so hard to keep our country safe.

At our last markup two months ago, I said this Committee could do better. The Majority's preparation for this markup underscores how much work remains to be done. Even bills where Republicans and Democrats are not far apart have fallen victim to the Majority's take-it-or-leave-it approach to legislating. H.R. 8631, offered by Representative Gimenez of Florida, is an example of how the Majority has failed to constructively engage with Committee Democrats on an issue of shared concern.

Indeed, the Committee has not conducted *any* meaningful oversight on this issue: not a single briefing with DHS, not a single hearing. Nonetheless, we are rushing to legislate on this issue out of left field. Democrats support freeing DHS from reliance on Chinese-made batteries. We recognize the importance of a secure supply chain for these important products, and we recognize the strategic importance of encouraging the production of U.S.-made batteries. Yet the extreme H.R. 8631 fails to consider the reality DHS faces in implementing a Chinese-made battery procurement ban.

This measure, which is simply a knock-off of a provision adopted for the Department of Defense in last year's National Defense Authorization Act and haphazardly applied to DHS, needs a lot more work. Democrats asked the Republican Majority to hold off on considering this measure while we engaged with DHS on how such a ban would be implemented, especially given the massive budgetary difference between DHS and DOD. We had questions about how DHS may use batteries implicated by this legislation. We wondered how DHS could source batteries made in the U.S. by American companies given China's dominance in the field, and how much a ban would cost.

We wondered how DHS's transition to electric vehicles would be impacted by such a ban—and whether American auto manufacturers would be affected. We were concerned that a total ban in a short period of time would adversely impact DHS operations and national security. These questions seem reasonable

to me. But the Republican Majority told us to pound sand. I guess the Committee will just have to report this bill to figure out precisely what it does and how much it will cost. That's a shame. But Democrats will give our Republican colleagues a chance to make this bill better, because like I said before, we *do not* disagree with its intent.

An amendment to be offered by Representative Suozzi would ask the Department to study the feasibility, costs, and impact of a ban. Since the Committee has not done any oversight, let's try to get some facts.

An amendment to be offered by Representative Ramirez would tie a ban to the Secretary's certification that there would not be adverse impacts to DHS operations but still require DHS to divest of Chinese-made batteries by 2029—giving DHS time to successfully implement a ban and giving American manufacturers time to scale up and account for new demand.

I will offer an amendment that would correct an error in the bill's current construction, which names six precise companies rather than tying the ban to dynamic lists maintained by the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, and Department of Commerce that keep up with the latest developments in the industry. Companies change names, reform themselves in different ways, and hide themselves under subsidiaries all the time. The current bill does not address those dynamic problems. This amendment would correct those defects.

An amendment to be offered by Representative Thanedar would add a rule of construction that protects American auto manufacturers and the Department's transition to electric vehicles.

An amendment to be offered by Representative Kennedy would require the Secretary to produce a strategy to incentivize DHS to work with American clean energy firms consistent with an Executive Order from President Biden.

Mr. Chairman, had Democratic feedback and concerns been taken into consideration prior to today's markup of this bill, this Committee could have sent a well-crafted, bipartisan message that Republicans and Democrats alike recognize the threat posed by China and stand unified in defense of our national and homeland security. A rushed, poorly written bill like this one, on the other hand, just signals weakness and division.

Let's adopt the Democratic amendments today—which were submitted in advance under the roster process for full transparency—and speak with one voice on this important issue. It's better for the Department, and it's better for our country. The Democratic-led measures to be considered at today's markup are also good for our country.

Representative Lou Correa of California, the ranking member of the Border Security and Enforcement Subcommittee, sponsors H.R. 4574, the "Cooperation on Combatting Human Smuggling and Trafficking Act," which aims to strengthen border security by establishing or expanding partnerships with law enforcement entities in Mexico and Central and South American countries to identify and disrupt human smuggling and trafficking operations.

H.R. 6229, the "DHS Special Events Program and Support Act," is sponsored by a very recent Member of our Committee, Representative Dina Titus of Nevada. Her bill would authorize the Special Event Assessment Rating, or SEAR, program within DHS. The SEAR program, which measures the risk of

terrorist attack and other hazards, as appropriate, on a special event, never has been authorized by Congress but is an essential resource for State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments that host pre-planned special events ranging from rodeos to Formula One races to high-profile NFL games.

Representative Thanedar of Michigan offers H.R. 8645, the “Improved Screening for Veterans and Passengers with Disabilities Act,” which would allow severely injured or disabled veterans to enroll in TSA PreCheck for free and ensures that if passengers with disabilities or medical conditions are enrolled in PreCheck, they will receive expedited screening even in non-PreCheck screening lanes, such as lanes dedicated to passengers with disabilities. One thing I hope we can all agree on is that injured or disabled veterans deserve our thanks as well as a seamless experience at TSA screening checkpoints.

And the Committee’s newest Member, Representative Tim Kennedy of New York, offers H.R. 8662, the “TSA Commuting Fairness Act,” which will require TSA to conduct a feasibility study on treating as on-duty hours the time TSA employees spend traveling between duty stations and airport parking lots and bus and transit stops. TSA employees should not be penalized for their often long commutes, and this bill would have TSA look into correcting this problem with the use of technology, such as an employee’s mobile phone.

Mr. Chairman, Democrats always stand ready and willing to engage with Republicans on issues of shared concern and importance to the American people. Unfortunately, we are often met with unnecessary difficulty in return.

As I said at the outset, we can do better.

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