



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. 1516, H.R. 4403, H.R. 5969, H.R. 6174, and H.R. 6231

November 8, 2023

Today, the Committee will consider four measures that aim to broadly improve the operations of the Department of Homeland Security.

Mr. Carter's "Securing the Cities Improvement Act" would allow the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, or CWMD, to determine which cities it partners with for the Securing the Cities program, rather than having that partnership tied to a FEMA grant program: the Urban Area Security Initiative. This would allow CWMD to determine its partners based on the capability and capacity of the jurisdiction rather than the variable UASI designation. This bill would provide stability within the Securing the Cities program and partnerships with at-risk cities.

Mr. Ivey's "Department of Homeland Security Policy Issuance Review Act" is a good government measure meant to enhance congressional review of certain Department-level internal policies, many of which provide foundational guidance to offices and employees. The briefing required by the bill would not only improve congressional oversight, but it would also help DHS prevent long gaps in policy review, review, and cancellation.

Mr. Luttrell's "Improving Travel for Families Act" would permit children 10 years of age or under to accompany their parent or legal guardian through the Global Entry lane at U.S. international airports if the parent participates in Global Entry. Customs and Border Protection agrees that Global Entry should be more family friendly, and I understand CBP is already working on guidance to implement the intent of the bill.

Mr. Strong's "DHS Biodetection Improvement Act" requires DHS to produce an assessment and strategy regarding how DHS uses the Department of Energy's national laboratories and sites for biodetection capabilities. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 already contemplates DHS partnering with national labs, and this measure would give Congress greater insight into that work with regard to biodetection capabilities. At this point, though, I would like to note that both Mr. Strong's and Mr. Carter's bills require a fully functioning Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office. That office's authority is set to expire next month, and its closure would endanger national security.

In May, our Committee sought to extend the life of CWMD by 7 years, but despite a unanimous voice vote, Mr. D'Esposito's bill has not made it to the House floor. I hope the Chairman will join me in doing everything possible to make sure this critical office does not close next month.

Now, Mr. Chairman, our side of the aisle was looking forward to a bipartisan, seamless markup with bills that enhance the security of our Nation. However, Republican extremism has found its way into today's proceeding.

I will turn to Mr. Pfluger's "DHS Restrictions on Confucius Institutes and Chinese Entities of Concern Act." There is no question that the People's Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party have sought to influence U.S. colleges and universities for malign purposes through Confucius Institutes and other programs.

I support the intent of this bill, and I voted for the thoughtful, bipartisan version of the bill that emerged from this Committee last Congress. So, I was disappointed that Mr. Pfluger chose to ignore last Congress's bill and introduce the unworkable version that is before us today. H.R. 1516 would deny almost all the colleges and universities in each of our districts, critical DHS funds, which could jeopardize emergency preparedness and response.

As written, the bill also fails to contain waiver language that is currently given to the Secretary of Defense under existing law. Such a waiver would provide strategic flexibility to the Secretary of Homeland Security, and it is absolutely essential for a bill like this. Too often this Congress, Mr. Chairman, Republicans have chosen to play politics with national security instead of taking "yes" for an answer.

Later, I will offer an amendment containing the text of Mr. Pfluger's bill that we agreed to last Congress. My amendment will offer Members the opportunity to oppose Chinese interference in a way that does not burden our colleges and universities and unnecessarily tie DHS's hands.

I hope my colleagues will join me in sending one clear, bipartisan message to the PRC and CCP by adopting my amendment.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978