



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

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Byrd Presses for Action on Homeland Security Funding

Washington, DC.... Today, U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, sent a letter to President Bush that urges reconsideration of his ill-advised veto threat of the Fiscal Year 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations legislation. With threats to the nation growing, Byrd is pressing the President to spend real dollars and invest in the tools and technology that will secure the homeland and protect Americans from terrorist attacks.

Byrd, who Chairs the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, emphasized comments made last week by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, who publicly spoke of his "gut feeling" that the United States faces an increased threat of attack this summer. Building on Chertoff's remarks, the nation's best intelligence analysts issued a report that advises "the nation will face a persistent and evolving terrorist threat over the next three years." Byrd was aghast that Republicans would object to debate on the Homeland Security funding legislation that is critical to the safety and security of the nation. In order to be prepared for the threats against the nation and prevent future terrorist attacks, the Senate must do its part to fund first responders, border security, immigration enforcement, port security, and aviation security.

Text of Senator Byrd's Letter to President Bush:

July 18, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush

The President

The White House

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

"We judge the US Homeland will face a persistent and evolving terrorist threat over the next three years. The main threat comes from Islamic terrorist groups and cells, especially al-Qa'ida, driven by their undiminished intent to attack the

Homeland and a continued effort by these terrorist groups to adapt and improve their capabilities[W]e judge that al-Qa'ida will intensify its efforts to put operatives here. As a result, we judge that the United States currently is in a heightened threat environment."

Those are the words contained in the declassified National Intelligence Estimate, released yesterday. Those are the words written by the best intelligence analysts in our government. Those are the words that should force our government -- both in the Executive and Legislative branches -- to reevaluate the priority that we are giving to funding to stop terrorist attacks against this country.

The Senate Committee on Appropriations has approved legislation investing \$37.6 billion in the nation's highest-priority security projects. These dollars would be put to use immediately, toughening border security with new agents, better technology, and stricter immigration enforcement to close gaps that terrorists could exploit (as did the 9/11 hijackers). These dollars would help to shut down the dangerous gaps in security at U.S. seaports. The legislation would make serious investments in security at the nation's airports, deploying new canine teams and screening technology at airports nationwide to detect explosives and radiation in cargo loaded onto passenger aircraft. The funds would provide critical support for police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical teams -- the first line of response to any attack.

Unfortunately, you have threatened to veto the homeland security funding legislation. In light of the new analysis from our intelligence experts and the warnings that they and

Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff have voiced, I urge you to reconsider this veto threat.

With the concerns outlined by your Administration's top experts, and with the glaring gaps that continue to exist in our homeland security protections, we must come together in the best interests of the American people. It is their lives and their futures in danger. Posturing will not protect the people from attack. Smart investments in their security will.

Text of Senator Byrd's floor remarks :

I rise today to express my surprise that there is actually an objection to taking up the FY 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations Bill today. The bill, which was reported by the Appropriations Committee by a vote of 29-0, provides \$37.6 billion to help secure the homeland. That includes funds to secure our borders, funds to hire 3,000 more border patrol agents, and funds to provide 4,000 more detention beds. It includes funds for the men and women of the Coast Guard to guard our ports and seaways. It includes funds to protect two million citizens who travel by air every day, including money to inspect air cargo on passenger aircraft. There are funds to implement the SAFE Port Act. We include funds to equip and train our police, fire, and emergency medical personnel to deal with any disaster.

Incredibly, the President has threatened to veto the Homeland Security Appropriations Bill because it exceeds his request. And today, we have heard an objection to even debating the bill from a Member on the President's side of the aisle.

Just last week, the Secretary of Homeland Security publicly said that it was his "gut feeling" that the United States faces an increased threat of attack this summer. Shouldn't that wake us up to the need to pass this bill?

On the heels of the Secretary's warnings, yesterday, the Administration released its latest National Intelligence Estimate concerning the terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland. I will quote from the report: "We judge the U.S. Homeland will face a persistent and evolving terrorist threat over the next three years. The main threat comes from Islamic terrorist groups and cells, especially alQa'ida, driven by their undiminished intent to attack the Homeland and a continued effort by these terrorist groups to adapt and improve their capabilities . . . [W]e judge that al-Qa'ida will intensify its efforts to put operatives here. As a result, we judge that the United States currently is in a heightened threat environment.... We assess that al-Qa'ida's Homeland plotting is likely to continue to focus on prominent political, economic, and infrastructure targets with the goal of producing mass casualties, visually dramatic destruction, significant economic aftershocks, and/or fear among the US population."

Those are the words written by the best intelligence analysts in our government. Is anybody listening? You can bet the American public is listening. These warnings should compel our government -- both in the Executive and Legislative branches -- to get our priorities straight. It is the safety of the American people that matters here, not some political ping pong between the President and the Congress. Our mission must be to prevent terrorist attacks against this country.

In light of the concerns raised by his own Administration about the threat of another terrorist attack, I call on the President to pull back on his veto threat. I plead with all Senators to allow this body to do the people's business and proceed to the Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

The people's safety is at stake, and delay is foolish.

I ask unanimous consent to insert in the Record my letter to the President, dated today, on this matter.

I yield the floor.