

May 9, 2007: Department of Homeland Security Authorization Act

The Honorable Loretta Sanchez

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008

May 09, 2007

Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 1684, the Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2008 Authorization bill.

As the Vice Chair of the Homeland Security Committee I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this important, bipartisan authorization bill that will provide much needed guidance to and oversight of the Department of Homeland Security, and will be the first DHS Authorization bill voted on by the House.

H.R. 1684 contains many key provisions that will improve the Department's long range planning, accountability, personnel development. It will also provide long-neglected authorization for critical programs at the Department.

This legislation authorizes an Undersecretary for Policy and a Comprehensive Homeland Security Review at the start of each new Presidential Administration.

These provisions will help ensure that the Department is looking beyond the crisis at hand, planning for the future, and keeping its resources aligned with its mission and the National Strategy for Homeland Security.

In addition, I am pleased that this legislation includes a sense of the Congress that the consolidation of the Department's headquarters on the West campus of St. Elizabeth's Hospital should move forward rapidly.

I believe the establishment of this headquarters will have a positive effect on the efficiency, operations, and morale of the Department.

In terms of accountability, H.R. 1684 requires enhanced oversight of large contracts under the Department's Secure Border Initiative.

Personnel development is a major issue for the Department. This legislation authorizes expanded procurement training

for acquisition employees; and enhanced incentives for the recruitment and retention of Border Patrol agents.

The bill also addresses several key policy areas. These include requiring the Department to plan for the implementation of the biometric exit component of the US-VISIT program.

This is an essential border security issue that will enable us to know who is in the country, and to better track people overstaying their visas.

In addition this legislation provides five year authorization of the Metropolitan Medical Response System, a critical program to ensure response capabilities for all-hazards mass casualty events.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 1684, and in working together to have a Homeland Security Authorization bill signed into law this year for the first time ever.