

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) and the U.S. House voted today to approve the Homeland Security Appropriations bill to address the nation's most pressing homeland security needs and invest in missions critical to preventing, protecting, responding to, and recovering from acts of terrorism, natural disasters, and other emergency threats. The legislation, which works to implement many of recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, provides first responders with additional training and equipment; improves aviation and port security; provides additional border patrol agents for the country; and protects taxpayer dollars by appropriating additional funds for oversight while encouraging increased competition in contracting.

“We have a responsibility to help protect our communities and provide for the safety and security of our citizens,” said Hoyer. “I am proud to support legislation that makes sound investments in critical homeland security measures and gives the men and women who respond to emergencies the tools and resources they need.”

The 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations bill includes:

- Provides over \$3 billion for training and equipment for first responders, expands support for local law enforcement personnel, firefighters and other first responders and rejects the President's \$1 billion cut for these vital programs.
- Includes new emphasis on port security by significantly increasing funding to protect critical port facilities and infrastructure.
- Improves aviation security by providing funding for new explosive detection systems at airports and funding to double the amount of cargo screened on passenger aircraft.
- Includes funding for 3,000 additional Border Patrol agents, bringing the number of Border Patrol agents to a record 17,819.
- Reduces funding for projects that have been mismanaged or lack detailed plans
- Encourages investment in dual use programs and technologies that can be utilized to respond to both terrorist attacks, accidents, and natural disasters

The Homeland Security bill also restores draconian cuts proposed by President Bush to two successful competitive grant programs that help fire departments in Maryland and across the country meet equipment and personnel needs. The passed legislation provides a \$575 million

investment in the Assistance to Fire Grant Program (AFG) - \$275 million more than the President's request and \$28 million over last year's level. The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program, which was eliminated altogether by the President, is funded at \$230 million – double last year's level.

“Our volunteer and career firefighters provide an unbelievable service and sacrifice a great deal to protect our communities, despite often having to operate on a very limited budget,” said Rep. Hoyer. “These grant programs are necessary to provide our first responders with the equipment and training they need to keep their departments running safely and efficiently.”

As co-chair of the Congressional Fire Caucus, Congressman Hoyer has played a lead role in helping establish and fund both the AFG and SAFER programs. When he was a member of the Appropriations Committee, Hoyer was a staunch leader in fighting to restore attempts to cut funding, and this year, spearheaded a letter to the Appropriations Committee signed by more than 100 members advocating for funding above the Administration's requests for AFG and SAFER.

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