

the groundwork in identifying the significant historical properties within such a concentrated area along U.S. Route 15. Dozens of towns and counties along the corridor have offered letters of support as have local civic groups. The Virginia General Assembly also has approved a resolution of support.

This legislation has been painstakingly drafted to ensure that the rights of private property owners within the district will not be usurped. In fact, designation as a heritage area increases the rights of property owners giving them an opportunity to learn more about the significance of their own property and allowing them to market their property as historically significant. Landowners should have the right to choose preservation and protection along with the right to choose to build town homes, malls and highways.

The legislation clearly states: "Nothing in this Act shall be construed to modify the authority of Federal, State, or local governments to regulate land use." Additionally, the only new federal funds accessible to The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership will be for the management of the heritage area.

The bill also specifically prohibits the use of eminent domain and the ability of the management entity to regulate land use. The Government Accountability Office, the nonpartisan research service for the legislative branch, has investigated the effect of a heritage area designation on land use decisions. Its 2004 report states: "Heritage area officials, Park Service headquarters and regional staff, and representatives of national property rights groups that we contacted were unable to provide us with any examples of a heritage area directly affecting—positively or negatively—private property values or use."

This legislation is a local effort to recognize the history and beauty of this region. The organizers are local landowners who have the vision to appreciate that they live among the nation's most precious resources and history. The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership conducted a poll of the residents in the heritage area and found that 81 percent of those polled expressed support for the initiative.

To understand the importance of this initiative, I refer to the words of Thomas Jefferson in his Notes on the State of Virginia:

You stand on a very high point of land. On your right comes up the Shenandoah, having ranged along the foot of the mountain a hundred miles to seek a vent. On your left approaches the Potomac, in quest of a passage also. In the moment of their junction, they rush together against the mountain, rend it asunder, and pass off to the sea. The first glance of this scene hurries our senses into the opinion that this earth has been created in time, that the mountains were formed first, that the rivers began to flow afterwards, that in this place, particularly, they have been dammed up by the Blue Ridge of mountains, and have formed an ocean which filed the whole valley; that continuing to rise they have at length broken over this spot, and have torn the mountains down from its summit to its base. The piles of rocks on each hand, but particularly on the Shenandoah, the evident marks of their disrapture and avulsion from their beds by the most powerful agents of nature, corroborate the impression. But the distant finishing, which nature has given to the picture, is of a very different character. It is a true contrast to the foreground. It is as placid and delightful as that is wild and tremen-

dous. For the mountain being cloven asunder, she presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small catch of smooth, blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate in the calm below.

The landscape Jefferson depicts has been inspirational to American leaders for hundreds of years. From Susquehannock Indian trading routes and to Revolutionary War battles; from the homes of the founding fathers to the first brave pioneers to make a home beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains; from the Civil War battles which threatened to divide the union to the underground railroad, our nation was forged along this route. From Blue Ridge Mountains to the west and the fertile Piedmont to the east of the corridor the route in many ways exhibits the birth and development of our nation's economy, social movements and political landscape. Perhaps even more significant than the battlefields that cluster along the route are the documents penned in the homes along the corridor. The Declaration of Independence, the Monroe Doctrine and the Marshall Plan have influenced not only this nation, but the entire world.

Every American citizen should take a trip along this route so that they know not only from where our nation has come, but also to where we are going. We cannot stand as a nation unless we know what this nation stands for.

As we come upon the 400th anniversary this year of America's birthplace at Jamestown, I urge my colleagues to join with me in supporting this legislation.

IMPLEMENTING THE 9/11 COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS ACT OF 2007

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 5, 2007

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, the 9/11 Commission produced an unprecedented, bipartisan evaluation of how terrorists were able to exploit our nation's security on September 11, 2001. The Commissioners made 41 valuable recommendations on how to prevent such an attack from occurring again. Unfortunately, not all of those recommendations were fulfilled by Congress and the Bush Administration. As a result, the American people remain at-risk, and our nation remains unprepared for a major emergency. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita slammed into the Gulf Coast, we were reminded again of how unprepared we still are to deal with national disasters—whether caused by nature or a terrorist attack.

The "Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007," which I am introducing today, will make the United States more secure by closing many of the security gaps that continue to expose our nation to the risk of a terrorist attack.

Enactment of this legislation will make it more difficult for terrorists to obtain nuclear materials, ensure that first responders finally have the equipment they need to respond to a disaster, airplanes will be more secure, our borders will be harder for terrorists to penetrate, our police and other local law enforce-

ment will finally get the information they need about terrorist threats, and ports and other critical infrastructure will be made more secure. Perhaps most importantly, this bill makes these improvements in security without endangering our American way of life because it puts in place strong new privacy and civil liberties protections.

Specifically, this bill provides much-needed support to the first responders at the State, local, and tribal levels who bear the brunt of the emergency response and preparedness burden. The 9-11 Commission recommended that homeland security funds designed to improve emergency preparedness be allocated based on risk, and that steps be taken to provide first responders with communications systems that are fully interoperable in an emergency. This bill fulfills these recommendations by providing for risk-based evaluation and prioritization of homeland security grants and enhanced accountability for grant distribution and use, so that federal aid will go where it is most needed. Moreover, it creates a stand-alone grant program to help States, local and tribal governments erect the interoperable communications systems that are so vital to effective emergency response. It also encourages the use of a unified command during an emergency, so that Federal officials work more closely with State, local, and tribal governments in preparation and response efforts.

The 9/11 Commission found that many Federal agencies had information that could have led to the arrest and capture of the September 11th hijackers, but that this information did not reach the Federal, State, and local officials who could have acted on it. This bill acts on the 9/11 Commission's recommendation to improve intelligence and information sharing between Federal authorities and their State and local counterparts. First, it establishes the Fusion and Law Enforcement Education and Training (FLEET) Grant Program to strengthen the capabilities of local fusion centers and to foster cooperation among State and local law enforcement officers. It also establishes the Border Intelligence Fusion Center Program, which will put experienced Federal border security personnel to fusion centers in border States to enhance collaboration. Additionally, it provides more State and local law enforcement officers with the opportunity to gain valuable experience working in Washington with Department of Homeland Security officials. Finally, it ensures the Department itself has the technology and organization needed to facilitate intelligence and information sharing.

Our nation's aviation system, which was easily exploited by the September 11th hijackers, will also be made more secure through this bill. The 9/11 Commission found that more steps need to be taken to secure air cargo and checked baggage and to ensure airport checkpoints have the equipment necessary to detect explosives. This bill meets those concerns. First, it requires TSA to develop a system so that 100 percent of air cargo carried on passenger aircraft is inspected by 2009. Second, it provides for an additional billion dollars to be made available over the next four years to put modern baggage screening systems in place. It also creates an innovative new \$250 million trust fund to address the risk of suicide bombers at the checkpoint by strengthening explosive detection at the checkpoint. The Department will also have to explain how it plans to undertake efforts to prescreen passenger

names against terrorist watch lists, a task the airlines are still charged with doing over five years after 9/11. At the same time, a new, streamlined system will be put in place for innocent people to establish their identities and prevent them from being misidentified against “No Fly” or “Selectee” lists.

One of the most frightening aspects of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Flight 93 is that the planes all took off from domestic airports, meaning that each of the hijackers was already in the United States. In response to these disconcerting facts, this bill strengthens accountability for plans to implement biometric verification of foreign nationals entering and exiting the United States, as well as improved integration of the Visa Security and Terrorist Travel Programs. Moreover, this measure authorizes badly needed support and personnel for the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center, in order to enhance its ability to combat human smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorist travel.

In addition to addressing domestic homeland security gaps, this bill also contains multiple provisions that deal with security concerns outside the United States. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, we have become increasingly aware of the growing threat posed by terrorists with access to nuclear materials and other weapons of mass destruction. This bill takes up those concerns

by providing some of the building blocks needed to mitigate the international aspects of terrorism. This bill complements existing laws and provides resources to encourage international cooperation to stem proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It also addresses the terrorism implications of the nuclear black market, and mandates that U.S. foreign assistance and arms sales be withdrawn from countries that condone or engage in nuclear proliferation networks.

Another way that this bill protects against the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction is to strengthen security procedures for cargo entering the United States from foreign ports. Building upon the recently enacted SAFE Ports Act, this bill requires all cargo containers to be scanned before they reach U.S. ports within five years, and requires port security personnel to use the best technology available in scanning containers for radiation and density.

While it addresses a number of security concerns, this bill would also strengthen protection of privacy rights and civil liberties. Although it was created in 2004 on the recommendation of the 9/11 Commission, the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board has been little more than a shell that has failed to live up to its promise and protect the basic freedoms of Americans. This bill would take three key steps toward making the Board a legitimate force of accountability and trans-

parency in the federal government. First, it would remove the Board from the Executive Office of the President, making it an independent and autonomous body. Second, this bill would require all Board members to be confirmed by the Senate, which will minimize political influence by the President and other executive officials whose actions it oversees. Finally, this bill would empower the Board as the Chief Privacy Officer with the authority to subpoena witnesses and evidence, a key investigative tool that would greatly strengthen the Board's ability to uncover questionable or unlawful action.

The best way to honor those who lost their lives because of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 is to make sure that kind of attack never happens again. Similarly, there must be a stronger commitment to giving first responders and communities the resources they need to respond quickly and vigorously to terrorist attacks and significant natural disasters. The 9/11 Commission did an exemplary job of locating weaknesses and making recommendations for strengthening homeland security. Now it falls to us, the U.S. Congress, to follow through on those recommendations. The 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007 is a critical step in fulfilling that mission, and I urge my colleagues in the House of Representatives to join me in supporting it.