

rated bridge with more traffic, greater relative importance to the rest of the system, and overall more need for investment. This bill would create yet another level of bureaucracy to a bridge program over-burdened with red tape, as State risk-management plans will have to be approved by the Department of Transportation.

The requirements for the risk management system set forth in H.R. 3999 are vague and unspecific. However, there is a wide concern among State departments of transportation that they will be interpreted by FHWA to force one-size-fits-all Federal standards that ignore local considerations and variations in risk factors across the country, such as seismic retrofit.

States are already using a highly effective bridge management system to address risk when making State-wide bridge investment decisions; this bill will disrupt these efforts.

In closing I will reiterate that I fully agree that the current Highway Bridge Program needs work, but so does the entire Federal Highway Program and I believe we need a comprehensive solution. I look forward to working with my colleagues to that end.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, democracy and the rule of law have become firmly entrenched in many Central and Eastern European nations. We must be forthright and firm in our support for the continued independence and territorial integrity of the still fledgling CEE democracies.

The political and economic transformation of the region is nothing short of breathtaking. After years of untold suffering under Soviet rule, these countries have boldly embraced common transatlantic values of liberty and democracy with profound and positive consequences.

Internal reforms, including increased government accountability and efforts to eradicate corruption, have spurred economic transformations reaching deep within each country. Respect for human rights and democratic reforms have invigorated civil society. The progress and achievements in the region are inspirational, and I join with the 22 million Americans of Central and Eastern European heritage in taking great pride in the democratization of these former Soviet bloc countries.

But the great strides in freedom and democracy in the region are under threat. Russia's recent military incursion into the neighboring country of Georgia was a dramatic wake-up call. Some have suggested the incursion is a harbinger of Russian desires to limit the sovereignty and pro-Western orientation of vulnerable neighboring countries. I hope that is not the case.

Just last month, the leaders of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Ukraine stood together with Georgian

President Mikheil Saakashvili to demonstrate solidarity in the face of Russia's incursion. The United States pledged its support for the democratically elected Government of Georgia and for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. European leaders helped broker a cease-fire agreement. The United States, Europe, and the CEE nations must continue to stand together in the face of Russian aggression and interference in the region.

Nevertheless, as disturbing as Russia's behavior has been, we must find a way to step back from the path of confrontation with Russia. It makes better sense to find common ground than to engage in confrontation. This does not mean indulgence of Russia's recent actions. On the contrary, we must find a way to work with Russia without ceding freedom and democracy in the region.

Let me be clear. I am deeply committed to the continued freedom, democracy, and independence of the Central and Eastern European nations. At the same time, I fully support the democratization of Russia. Ultimately, we need to find a way to improve relations with Russia, but the effort cannot be one-sided.

It is in Russia's own economic interest to step up to the plate and be a positive member of the international community. Our relationship with Russia may be complicated, but we can find common ground in working together to strengthen global security, economic stability, and democracy. Moreover, the United States needs Russia as a partner in building a peaceful and prosperous Europe.

The United States does not have to choose between the Central and Eastern European countries and Russia. We should be able to form real partnerships with both.

DOMESTIC INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS POST 9/11

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, it has been more than 7 years since al-Qaida attacked us at home. There are many lessons those attacks should have taught us, many things we should have been doing as a nation since that date which we have yet to do. These post-9/11 gaps in our efforts and strategies need as much if not more attention today as they did on September 12, 2001. The largest gap we face is a strategic gap between what we should have done and what this administration elected to do in response to the tragic events of 9/11. The administration chose to attack Iraq rather than complete the mission in Afghanistan—where the 9/11 attacks were hatched—and address al-Qaida's expanding influence in northern Africa, Southeast Asia, and beyond. Those threats are real and have the continuing potential to manifest themselves again in disastrous ways here at home and around the world.

There are other gaps—failures by this administration to address the real

challenges of our post-9/11 world. We have created a gap in the readiness of our military. Our National Guard, an integral part of any large disaster response, has been severely strained. We continue to have insufficient intelligence and information resources posted abroad. We have insufficient diplomatic personnel, with insufficient language and other cultural experience, to cover the many places in the world where our national security interests require that we know more—and interact with those who know us least. And while I applaud the efforts of this administration to encourage more of our citizens to engage in international volunteer programs, there is room for much more to be done to strengthen our image and our impact abroad through citizen outreach and private diplomacy. In a post-9/11 world, these continuing gaps pose real threats to our security at home, and we cannot ignore them at the expense of a strategically misguided and perilously expensive ongoing military presence in Iraq.

Closer to home, we are now beginning to suffer serious challenges to our economic stability and longer term economic outlook. We are squandering our wealth and failing to invest in our economic future and our domestic security. Osama bin Laden's stated goal was to bankrupt America. Well, the cost of our presence in Iraq may ultimately exceed the massive cost proposed to bail out our failed financial systems. And what do we have to show for the hundreds of billions spent in Iraq? What do Americans have as a return on their investment? A more perilous world in which al-Qaida has a safe haven in Pakistan, our power and influence are diminished and our military might is badly overextended.

So where do we go from here? We go where Americans have always gone in times of challenge. We will take up the challenge we face head-on and work to close the gaps we face in the fabric of our domestic security.

Here at home, we continue to have critical gaps in our domestic security, in our infrastructure, in our first responder systems. We still have not deployed an effective system to prevent the smuggling of radiological materials through our ports. We have not done everything we can to secure chemical facilities that could be the source of materials for domestic car bombs like the ones we have seen cause so much damage in Baghdad. We have not fully implemented the command system needed to ensure that first responders know how to work together across federal, state and local government.

We have also failed to establish the military forces needed to conduct medical triage, search and rescue, and decontamination in the wake of a WMD incident at home. I tried to offer an amendment to the 2009 Defense authorization bill that would have mandated that these forces be established by the end of 2009 and that they be maintained at the highest levels of readiness. This

amendment would have addressed what the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves characterized as an “appalling gap” in our domestic defenses. I was unsuccessful, but I will continue to press for enactment of this legislation. It is time that we get our priorities straight and put the defense of the American people first.

State and local authorities will always be the first to defend the American people in any disaster, whether manmade or natural. We need to ensure that we give them the resources they need to fulfill their responsibilities. That is why I have long supported adequate funding for homeland security and emergency management grants. I opposed the administration’s proposal to reduce funding for these grants this year and am pleased that 2009 Homeland Security appropriations bill, which we should vote on shortly, includes increased funding for these and other important State and local grant programs.

The security of our borders is another critical priority. While I had serious concerns about some provisions of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, the bill took some steps toward tightening border security that I strongly supported, such as requiring the Department of Homeland Security, DHS, to develop a national border security strategy and border surveillance plan. The bill also required DHS to develop a schedule for implementing the US-VISIT exit-entry program, created new criminal penalties for constructing border tunnels, provided grants to law enforcement agencies to address criminal activity along the border, and required the Government to work with countries south of the border to combat human smuggling and drug trafficking.

While that bill ultimately failed, I have supported other measures to enhance border security which have been signed into law, including funding to hire 23,000 new Border Patrol agents, put in place vehicle barriers along the border, install 105 radar and camera towers, remove and detain undocumented aliens, construct barriers, and purchase ground and aerial surveillance devices. Congress must take a practical approach to securing the borders and provide the resources necessary for our Government to carry out that important responsibility.

From our borders to the first responders in our communities, we face tremendous challenges. As we work to close those security gaps, we must also draw on America’s boundless capacity for innovation and creativity. We need those talents more than ever as we face unprecedented challenges in our energy sector and elsewhere. We remain hostage to foreign oil sources, yet we have not invested adequately in the necessary alternatives. We face huge challenges in our transportation systems, which consume the largest proportion of our petroleum resources. We are beginning to understand that fresh water

may be the next oil and that we have to use, conserve, and manage it as the scarce resource that it is. And where do these alternatives necessary to rebuild and sustain the economy of our future come from? Our history tells us they come from what President Eisenhower, in his farewell address to the Nation, called the “solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop”—the entrepreneurial small businessperson.

So we must invest in our skilled workers and our infrastructure. We must find ways to invigorate our creative and entrepreneurial small businesses so that we can not only drive innovation and employment but strengthen our own security in the process.

Two programs—the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs—are prime examples of how we can encourage innovation to improve our security. These highly successful programs not only need to be reauthorized, they need to be substantially increased and targeted at the key challenges of our time. Our domestic security, our innovative and entrepreneurial opportunities, our country’s longer term employment prospects, and our economic future are all directly benefited by these programs, which provide Federal money for small business innovation. And the National Research Council, after an exhaustive study of the SBIR Program, tells us that Congress could effectively increase funding of this effort. This is the kind of investment we need to be making in our national security and in our economic future.

As we make that investment, we should make security-related innovation a stated priority of SBIR, not simply a byproduct of some SBIR-supported research. There are few, if any, Government programs better positioned to develop technologies to protect the American people than SBIR. I have introduced legislation to make domestic security, water security and quality, transportation, and energy top SBIR priorities. By focusing SBIR innovation and research in all of these areas, but especially domestic security and water security and quality, we can do a great deal to address the security challenges we face.

Today there are many technologies addressing areas such as first responder emergency responses, detection of radioactive materials, cargo scanning and cybersecurity, that demand more research and innovation to meet our security needs in a post-9/11 world. Recent reports from the Government Accountability Office and the National Academy of Sciences, for instance, identify troubling gaps in first responders’ ability to deal with hazardous releases in urban areas or our ability to better track and detect radioactive materials. SBIR can fund the research that can close these security gaps, and that program—and most importantly the small business innovators them-

selves—deserve our full support in Congress.

Mr. President, as this administration comes to a close, we have an opportunity to revisit how best to address the gaps that have arisen in our national security both before and since 9/11. Our need to act is no less urgent now than it was 7 years ago, except that we have squandered time and great resources in the intervening period. I urge those of us who will return in the next Congress to work with the next administration to address these gaps with a renewed perspective on the sense of urgency they deserve.

FIREARMS AND SUICIDE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, a recent article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* examined the link between the presence of guns in the home and the chance of suicide. The article, written by Dr. Matthew Miller and Dr. David Hemenway, entitled “Guns and Suicide in the United States,” illustrates a direct correlation between having a loaded firearm in a home and the success rate of suicide attempts.

According to the article, in 2005, the most recent year mortality data are available, suicide was the second leading cause of death among Americans 40 years of age or younger. More than half of all suicides in the United States are carried out by a firearm. An average of 46 Americans per day committed suicide with a firearm in 2005, accounting for 53 percent of all completed suicides.

Many of the attempts made at suicide are both impulsive and fleeting. There is often a very short window between the time a person decides they are going to attempt suicide and the time they follow through with the attempt. These attempts are often made drastically, in reaction to a specific event. However, as the initial reaction to the event subsides, so often does the urge to attempt suicide. This is illustrated by the fact that more than 90 percent of the people who survive a suicide attempt, do not go on to die by suicide. Unfortunately, those attempt suicide using a firearm are rarely fortunate enough to survive and thus have an opportunity for reconsideration. Suicide attempts that involve drugs or cutting have a much lower mortality rate.

The article cites over a dozen studies that have found that there is between a two and ten times greater risk of suicide in a home with a firearm than without. These risks do not only increase for the gun owner but also for the gun owner’s spouse and children.

The simple fact is that guns increase the chance of suicide. Suicide prevention is a national problem that demands our attention and commitment. Congress must do its part by taking such steps as ensuring gun manufacturers supply trigger locks and closing the loopholes that allow young people easy access to guns.