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COUNTERTERRORISM INFORMATION SHARING IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2017

Mr. GALLAGHER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4569) to require counterterrorism information sharing coordination, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4569

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Counterterrorism Information Sharing Improvement Act of 2017”.

SEC. 2. COUNTERTERRORISM INFORMATION SHARING COORDINATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The President, acting through the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall ensure that, for counterterrorism purposes, the Department of the Homeland Security has access to biographic and biometric data collected by the United States Government on individuals associated with a terrorist organization.

(b) COORDINATION.—The President shall direct the heads of relevant Federal departments and agencies to coordinate with the Secretary of Homeland Security to minimize and overcome any administrative, technical, capacity, or classification challenges to carrying out subsection (a).

(c) PROTECTIONS.—The Secretary of Homeland Security shall ensure that all relevant laws, rules, and procedures, including the section 552(a) of title 5, United States Code (commonly referred to as the “Privacy Act” or the “Privacy Act of 1974”), regarding classification levels and civil rights and civil liberties are followed while seeking to carry out subsection (a).

(d) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall, consistent with the protection of classified information, submit to the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate a report on the implementation of this section.

(2) CONTENTS.—The report required under paragraph (1) shall include a description of how the data referred to in subsection (a) is utilized for Department of Homeland Security screening and vetting purposes and any challenges associated with incorporating such data into departmental screening and vetting systems.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GALLAGHER) and the gentleman from California (Mr. CORREA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GALLAGHER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

As we destroy the caliphate in the Middle East, foreign fighters and terrorist sympathizers have fled the battlefield and are looking for new ways to spread their hatred, recruit new followers, instill fear, kill innocent people, and disrupt our way of life.

The December 11 bombing at the New York City Port Authority Bus Terminal was the second terror attack in New York in less than 2 months and a grave reminder of the reality of this threat.

Given this current environment, at the direction of Chairman MCCAUL, I led a task force to identify specific national security challenges and examine how terrorists might infiltrate our homeland and bring harm to our people. Subsequently, we produced a report with a series of solutions to fix any identified weaknesses that may be exploited by our enemies.

This report resulted in several pieces of legislation that have come before the House today. To that end, my bill, the Counterterrorism Information Sharing Improvement Act, seeks to enhance the current information-sharing environment that exists within the Federal and military communities. Throughout the task force, we heard time and time again about the incredible amount of biometric and biographic data being pulled off battlefields in Syria and Iraq, as U.S. forces and our allies continue to roll back the territories once held by ISIS.

It is often DOD personnel that encounter ISIS fighters on the battlefield, which often leads to the collection of valuable data. However, if these fighters and their associates move back to the West or try to enter the U.S., the DHS becomes the primary entity that will engage them. Therefore, it is critical that the data recovered by the DOD in the battlefield is able to reach the DHS and its systems for effective frontline screening and vetting of known or suspected terrorists.

In order to verify we are utilizing this information to support our counterterrorism efforts, we must ensure that the Department of Homeland Security gets access to that data in a timely manner, particularly so that it can be used for screening and vetting purposes. My bill directs the President, acting through the Secretary of Homeland Security, to ensure that the DHS has access to biographic and biometric data collected by the U.S. Government on individuals associated with a terrorist organization. The bill also directs the Secretary to report to Congress on these efforts.

The U.S. must prioritize any opportunity to identify bad actors outside the country and expand our ability to identify and deter threats before they reach the homeland. Unfortunately, information-sharing challenges among U.S. agencies can prevent valuable information from becoming available for

frontline screening and vetting. Not only is this a bureaucratic challenge, given the number of separate government agencies and components involved, but legal capacity and technical issues exist as well.

This bill will address these challenges and create improved collaborations between the Department of Homeland Security and its other Federal and military partners.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4569, the Counterterrorism Information Sharing Improvement Act of 2017. This bill seeks to ensure that the DHS gets access to biometric and biographic data collected by the United States Government to carry out its counterterrorism efforts.

Since 9/11, the Democratic members of this committee have been committed to bolstering terrorism information sharing within our government. Today, terrorist threats are decentralized, spreading beyond al-Qaida, al-Shabaab, and ISIL to a patchwork of small cells and lone wolves who stand ready to carry out violence to our country at their whim. Increasingly, this threat also includes homegrown violent extremists and domestic terrorists.

Ensuring that the DHS has access to biographic and biometric data on individuals associated with a terrorist organization is critical to comprehensive assessing of all forms of terrorism and threats to our government.

This legislation also requires that the DHS report on how the data is being received and utilized for screening and vetting purposes. This report will help Congress ensure that screening and vetting of travelers to the United States is conducted in a risk-based manner.

Mr. Speaker, I support this legislation and I am prepared to close.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this legislation ensures that the DHS have access to biographic and biometric data collected by our government on individuals associated with terrorist organizations. It is important that this information be integrated into the DHS' screening and vetting programs to protect our country, our citizens, from all forms of terrorism and extremism.

Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill. I thank my colleagues for their hard work in generating the task force report and all of the ideas that led to the variety of bills we are doing here today.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from

Wisconsin (Mr. GALLAGHER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4569.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SCREENING AND VETTING PASSENGER EXCHANGE ACT OF 2017

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4581) to require the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop best practices for utilizing advanced passenger information and passenger name record data for counterterrorism screening and vetting operations, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4581

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Screening and Vetting Passenger Exchange Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. PASSENGER SCREENING BEST PRACTICES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall develop best practices for utilizing advanced passenger information and passenger name record data for counterterrorism screening and vetting operations.

(b) CONSIDERATIONS.—The Secretary of Homeland Security shall, to the greatest extent practicable—

(1) make available to certain countries, including visa waiver program countries under section 217 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1187), the best practices required under subsection (a); and

(2) provide assistance to such countries in implementing such best practices.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK) and the gentleman from California (Mr. CORREA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today to voice my full support for H.R. 4581, the Screening and Vetting Passenger Exchange Act of 2017. This legislation directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop best practices for utilizing advanced passenger information, or API, and passenger names record data, or PNR, for

counterterrorism screening and vetting operations.

It also enables the Secretary to share those practices with our allies, including countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program, and to provide assistance in implementing these practices in those countries.

Having access to API, which is biographic information, and PNR data, which is data about reservation and itinerary information, allows our homeland security professionals to confirm the identities and travel patterns of potential criminals and terrorists before they enter the United States.

Allowing our men and women on the front lines to fight against terrorism, to work with Visa Waiver Program countries to make sure that they rise to the same standards only increases the safety of our Nation, the safety of all Americans traveling abroad, and the safety of all people across the globe. This legislation is a step in the right direction toward addressing further potential emerging threats.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to support our Nation's Homeland Security by supporting my bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 4581, the Screening and Vetting Passenger Exchange Act of 2017.

Mr. Speaker, the Screening and Vetting Passenger Act of 2017 requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and share best practices for using data provided by passengers in screening and vetting operations with our allies around the world.

Since 2014, more than 75 million international travelers have come to the United States. In recent years, especially during the Obama administration, great strides were made to use the information furnished by these incoming travelers to advance security screening and vetting processes.

Building upon the Department's 2017 last point of departure security enhancements that sought to raise the bar in physical screenings at overseas airports with direct flights to the U.S., this bill will further reinforce security measures and seek to provide our overseas partners with the capabilities to advance their own vetting and screening.

No country is immune from terrorism, and this bill will ensure that the DHS can be a valued partner to nations that work with us.

By providing best practices on passenger screening, H.R. 4581 seeks to ensure that terrorists seeking to inflict harm are not allowed to travel without detection.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my House colleagues to support this measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL),

the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Screening and Vetting Passenger Exchange Act. I want to thank Congressman FITZPATRICK for bringing this important legislation. The United States is currently experiencing one of the highest terror threat environments since 9/11.

Despite crushing the caliphate in Iraq and Syria, ISIS continues to demonstrate its capability to inspire attacks on the West, including in the homeland. The two terror attacks in New York City late last year are stark reminders of this reality and the threat facing the United States. Given the nature of this evolving threat, I established a task force on denying terrorists entry into the United States last year and I appointed Representative MIKE GALLAGHER to head up the effort.

I would like to thank all of the members of the task force for their hard work in making this effort a success. I charged this task force with examining how terrorists might infiltrate the homeland, identifying challenges with current U.S. Government information sharing and vetting procedures, and reviewing the screening agencies' structure and bureaucracy.

After completing its review, the task force issued a report outlining its findings and providing seven recommendations designed to address the identified gaps. These recommendations were the basis for several of the bills we are considering today. As evidenced by the recent spate of attacks, there is a large population of radicalized individuals in Europe who are willing to commit violence in the name of terrorist groups like ISIS. We must remain vigilant and cannot forget many of these individuals are just one flight away from the United States.

Given the seriousness of this threat, we must do more at home and abroad to screen and vet people seeking to enter the United States. The bills we are considering today will enhance our capabilities by improving information sharing and promoting efficiencies in the screening and vetting process, helping ensure the homeland is the best secured against terrorist infiltration.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to make international travel more secure and fosters a strong relationship between our country and our allies. All nations must increase their vigilance with respect to security screening. There are thousands of ISIL foot soldiers who may seek to enter the Western world and other nations to carry out their attacks. This legislation seeks to harness the United States' best practices and capabilities to advance the safety of the global aviation community as we face an agile and evolving enemy.