

H.R. 495

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 “Subterranean Border Defense Act”.

SEC. 2. ANNUAL REPORTS ON COUNTER ILLICIT CROSS-BORDER TUNNEL OPERATIONS.

Paragraph (2) of section 7134(a) of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (Public Law 117-263; 6 U.S.C. 257 note) is amended by inserting “and annually thereafter” after “development of the strategic plan”.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 495.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 495, the Subterranean Border Defense Act.

The collective failure of the last administration and its refusal to secure our borders allowed transnational criminal organizations to go unchecked in their efforts to infiltrate the United States.

Illicit tunnel pathways into our country have only made it easier for criminals to bring their illegal businesses into the homeland, from human trafficking to drug smuggling deadly fentanyl and other drugs that are being funneled from nations afar, including Communist China. Fortunately, President Trump, border czar Homan, and Secretary Noem have arrived to set the situation right.

H.R. 495 will require DHS to provide annual reports on its efforts to counter illicit tunnel operations at our borders.

I commend the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. CRANE) for his leadership on this effort, and I urge strong support for the measure.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in strong support of H.R. 495 because we need more oversight and information on the threat of tunnels going under our border.

It is a fact that tunnels, clandestine tunnels, under our borders have been an issue for not years but decades, and it is time we take action. It is time that Congress be informed of our progress to prevent such tunnels from

happening. That is why I support H.R. 495.

Tunnels are used by transnational criminal organizations looking to make a profit at the expense of our taxpayers. Over the last 30 years, cartels have created illegal and sophisticated tunnels under our border walls to smuggle drugs into our country, as well as money and weapons out of our country.

This bill creates an annual reporting requirement to keep Congress informed on the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to counter illicit cross-border tunnels and hold the bad actors accountable.

This information will help us, Congress, address the issue at the border and let us, as Members of Congress, better respond to the challenges.

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

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. CRANE), the author of this bill.

Mr. CRANE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favor of my bill, the Subterranean Border Defense Act, a bipartisan piece of border security legislation that I have introduced alongside the gentleman from California (Mr. CORREA).

Effective border security is created by overlapping deterrents, something we always need at our borders. The Subterranean Border Defense Act would help us address the growing threat of illicit cross-border tunnels by requiring annual reports to Congress on counter-tunneling operations, fortifying our security system at the border.

Put simply, this would help ensure that Congress has the necessary data to forge another much-needed layer of defense.

As transnational criminal organizations continue to grow in both size and sophistication, illicit cross-border tunnels along the southwest border of the United States represent a significant and growing threat to national security. Congress must address this deadly threat and ensure U.S. Customs and Border Protection has the resources needed to acquire counter-tunnel technology.

Since 1990, officials have discovered more than 140 tunnels that have breached the U.S. border, with an 80 percent increase in tunnel activity occurring since 2008.

Over the years, CBP has worked to combat these tunnels as part of their overall strategy. In fact, the United States conducts research, development, and test activities with Israel, which must contend with a vast network of Hamas tunnels originating in the Gaza Strip. This partnership helps us to detect and destroy tunnels in our respective countries.

The FY23 NDAA mandated that CBP submit a one-time report to Congress on a strategic plan to counter illicit cross-border tunnel operations. This

singular report has since led Congress to conduct critical oversight and has enabled CBP to formalize many of the processes, technologies, and resources needed to counteract illicit tunnels under the U.S.-Mexico border.

My bill would expand on this success by mandating a report every year going forward to ensure Congress has sufficient knowledge and oversight regarding this dynamic threat.

With border crossings thankfully going down since January, I think it is safe to assume this will drive threats at our border underground through these tunnels.

I thank Mr. CORREA for co-leading with me, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this legislation for a secure southern border.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for the purpose of closing.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill is an important step in the right direction. Receiving information from the Department of Homeland Security on an annual basis will improve Congress' efforts to counter illicit cross-border tunnels and hold bad actors accountable. I support this bipartisan piece of legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for the purpose of closing.

I again thank both of my colleagues, Mr. CORREA and Mr. CRANE, for putting this together.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 495, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GREEN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 495.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

DHS BIODETECTION IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 706) to improve the biodetection functions of the Department of Homeland Security, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 706

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 “DHS Biodefense Improvement Act”.

SEC. 2. DHS UTILIZATION OF DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY NATIONAL LABORATORIES AND SITES FOR CERTAIN BIODETECTION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT RELATING TO THE MISSIONS OF THE DHS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Homeland Security shall conduct an assessment of how the Department of Homeland Security has utilized Department of Energy national laboratories and sites regarding research and development in carrying out the missions of the Department of Homeland Security, in accordance with section 309 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 189).

(b) STRATEGY ON BIODETECTION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall submit to the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate the assessment required under subsection (a), together with a strategy for how the Department of Homeland Security will conduct research and development in coordination with Department of Energy national laboratories and sites to address biodefense research and development of the Department of Homeland Security, including the following:

(1) Identifying biodefense technologies that can, either individually or together, meet the biodefense mission needs as outlined in Department of Homeland Security capabilities analysis and requirements documents and informed by studies produced by the Comptroller General of the United States, such as the National Re-Assessment of the BioWatch Collector Network to Increase the Fraction of Population Covered, as developed by the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office of the Department in November 2021, and other such future studies as applicable.

(2) Developing an acquisition and procurement plan to acquire and provide, in accordance with Federal law, the Federal Acquisition Regulation, and Department of Homeland Security acquisition and procurement management directives, the biodefense technologies referred to in paragraph (1) to existing BioWatch jurisdictions.

(3) Conducting periodic external evaluations to identify gaps and potential failure points with respect to such biodefense technologies, and recommending contingency plans in the event such biodefense technologies do not perform as expected or intended.

(4) Assisting, as appropriate and in partnership with Federal, State, local, and Tribal governments, institutions of higher education (as such term is defined in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)), and the private sector, with the development of clearly defined program and technical requirements for future Department of Homeland Security environmental biodefense programs, including any related transformational program of research and development.

(c) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall provide to the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate an update of the assessment and strategy required under this section, including any challenges to implementing such strategy.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 706.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of H.R. 706, the DHS Biodefense Improvement Act.

Amidst the vast and evolving threat landscape we face today, our vigilance against biological weapons must remain strong. This bill will direct DHS to address the shortcomings it has faced in acquiring technologies for biodefense.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. STRONG) for his work on this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

I rise today in support of Representative STRONG's bill, H.R. 706, the DHS Biodefense Improvement Act.

This legislation is essential in advancing the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to protect Americans from emerging biological threats. Specifically, it seeks to enhance biodefense capabilities within DHS by requiring the Secretary to assess how the Department can leverage the research and development of the Department of Energy's national laboratories.

Biological threats, including deadly pathogens and bioterrorism agents, represent a constant and emerging danger to the public health and security of our Nation. However, the BioWatch program, which has been the cornerstone of our biodefense efforts, is now outdated.

H.R. 706 takes a crucial step forward by requiring DHS to assess how the Department of Energy's national laboratories can play an even greater role in improving our biodefense capabilities.

These labs are equipped with cutting-edge research and development capabilities that can help modernize our detection system. The national labs have the expertise and technologies necessary to enhance DHS' ability to detect, identify, and respond to biological threats much more effectively. Accessing this valuable research will enable DHS to modernize its biodefense tools and systems.

The bill also directs DHS to establish specific programs and technical requirements essential for advancing biodefense efforts, including vital research and development.

Furthermore, the bill requires the Homeland Security Secretary to submit to Congress a strategy for regular

external evaluations to identify capability gaps and propose contingency plans if biodefense technologies fall short.

As security threats continue to evolve, it is important that Congress support improvements in biodefense capabilities.

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

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. STRONG), the author of the legislation.

Mr. STRONG. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman GREEN for his support as well as my colleagues who joined me in introducing this legislation, H.R. 706, the DHS Biodefense Improvement Act.

The anthrax attacks of 2001 opened our eyes to a new dimension of national security risks, including the possibilities of bioterrorism. In response to this tragic event, the Department of Homeland Security launched the BioWatch program, a monitoring system that collects and tests air samples for biological agents likely to be used in a bioterrorism attack. This program has played an essential role in keeping us safe, providing valuable data on potential biological threats.

We must do everything we can to ensure that the tools we rely on remain as advanced and effective as possible, providing us with fast, accurate, and reliable data. Unfortunately, DHS has faced continuous challenges in acquiring capabilities to replace BioWatch.

While DHS has the authority to utilize the Department of Energy's national labs to identify and develop new technologies related to biodefense, they have yet to take advantage of this resource.

My legislation will advance America's bioweapon defense posture by directing the Secretary of Homeland Security to conduct an assessment of how, if at all, DHS has utilized this resource to address homeland security needs. It also directs DHS to submit a strategy for how the agency will coordinate with DOE to address biodefense research and development moving forward.

To ensure accountability, H.R. 706 requires DHS to report to Congress on the assessment and strategy no later than 1 year after the date of enactment.

As a first responder, I know there is more work to be done to harden our defenses against bioterrorism, and this legislation will ensure that DHS is utilizing all available resources and tools to do just that.

In the 118th Congress, I was proud to have the support of my colleagues in passing this legislation in the House. I urge my colleagues to join me once again in supporting this commonsense bill to ensure the security of our communities against biological threats.

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Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, while DHS has made tremendous efforts to enhance its bioterrorism capabilities, we still have a long way to go. That is why it is important to pass this legislation, H.R. 706, which will foster innovation in bioterrorism and ultimately strengthen our ability to protect our communities from biological threats.

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

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I, again, urge my colleagues to support H.R. 706, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GREEN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 706.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

TSA COMMUTING FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 862) to reduce commuting burdens on Transportation Security Administration employees, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 862

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 "TSA Commuting Fairness Act".

SEC. 2. FEASIBILITY STUDY ON TSA COMMUTING BENEFITS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration shall submit to the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate a study on the feasibility of treating as on-duty hours the time Transportation Security Administration employees working at airport locations spend traveling between regular duty locations and airport parking lots and bus and transit stops.

(b) CONSIDERATIONS.—In conducting the feasibility study required under subsection (a), the Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration shall consider the following with respect to Transportation Security Administration employees:

(1) The amount of time needed by such employees to travel between regular duty locations and airport parking lots and bus and

transit stops at small hub airports, medium hub airports, and large hub airports (as such terms are defined in section 40102 of title 49, United States Code).

(2) The amount of time such employees spend commuting, on average, exclusive of the time described in paragraph (1).

(3) The potential benefits to such employees and the Administration of treating as on-duty hours the time described in such paragraph.

(4) The feasibility of using mobile phones, location data, and any other means to allow such employees to report their arrival to and departure from the airport parking lots and bus and transit stops concerned.

(5) The estimated costs of treating as on-duty hours the time described in such paragraph, including by considering such hours creditable as basic pay for retirement purposes.

(6) Other considerations determined appropriate by the Administrator.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 862.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 862, the TSA Commuting Fairness Act.

TSA often struggles to adequately employ enough personnel. Given the high cost of housing near airports, travel time to and from work may be an inhibitor for current or future employees. This bill would require the TSA administrator to conduct a feasibility study to address this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the work of the gentleman from New York (Mr. KENNEDY) on 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, the ability of the TSA, or Transportation Security Administration, to recruit and retain a highly skilled, well-trained workforce is critical to our national security.

Since the agency was created in the aftermath of 9/11, TSA has helped prevent terrorist attacks against U.S. aircraft from happening.

The jobs of TSA employees are difficult, from the Transportation Security officers' perspective who screen millions of passengers a day, to Federal air marshals providing in-flight security, to canine handlers, inspectors, and cybersecurity experts, all helping to secure our air transportation system.

In recent weeks, life has only become harder for this workforce, as proba-

tionary employees have been fired and TSOs' collective bargaining rights have also come under attack.

Thankfully, we have the opportunity today, Mr. Speaker, to make life a bit easier for the hardworking civil servants of TSA.

The TSA Commuting Fairness Act, offered by my colleagues from New York, Mr. KENNEDY and Mr. GARBARINO, would require TSA to study the possibility of allowing employees' shifts to start upon arrival at the airport's parking lot and bus and transit stops.

These employees often face long commutes to get to the airport from the parking lot and then must travel long distances from the airport parking lots and transit stops to get to the TSA checkpoints.

Letting employees clock in using cell phones and location data would help alleviate the stress caused by irregular shuttles and the traffic that is very unpredictable around the airport.

This is a sensible bill, Mr. Speaker, that would address important quality-of-life concerns for a very critical workforce and, ultimately, our national security when it comes to commercial airline security.

I thank my colleagues for working in a bipartisan fashion to advance this measure, and I am glad to support it.

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

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

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. KENNEDY), the author of this measure.

Mr. KENNEDY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of my bill, H.R. 862, the TSA Commuting Fairness Act.

Year after year, through holiday seasons and spring breaks, air travel continues to break records. These numbers are at an all-time high and are expected to continue to increase this upcoming spring.

The Transportation Security Administration, or TSA, reported over 3 million travelers on the Sunday after Thanksgiving in 2024, with the 10 busiest days in TSA's history occurring last year.

Each day, we depend on hardworking TSA employees to keep our skies safe. Transportation Security officers, or TSOs, inspect travelers as they move through checkpoints; Federal air marshals ensure in-flight security; and canine handlers enhance the system's security.

However, TSA employees face unique challenges when commuting to work. Many employees find that the housing they can afford is far from airports, leading to long commutes with limited public transit options and heavy traffic. Airport employees often begin their workday by parking or being dropped off in a designated parking lot where they must then wait for inconsistent shuttle service to reach the terminal.