

PRODUCING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES FOR HOMELAND SECURITY ACT

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1692) to amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to enable secure and trustworthy technology through other transaction contracting authority, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1692

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 “Producing Advanced Technologies for Homeland Security Act” or the “PATHS Act”.

SEC. 2. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ACQUISITION PILOT PROGRAM EXTENSION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 831 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 391) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking “Until September 30, 2024, and subject to subsection (d)” and inserting “Until September 30, 2028, and subject to subsection (c)”; and

(B) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(3) OTHER TRANSACTION AUTHORITY INVOLVING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.—Not later than 72 hours after the use or extension of the transaction authority authorized under paragraph (1) involving artificial intelligence technology, the Secretary shall notify the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives and offer a briefing explaining the reason for the use or extension.”; and

(2) in subsection (c)(1), in the matter preceding subparagraph (A), by striking “September 30, 2024” and inserting “September 30, 2028”.

(b) REDUCTION IN AMOUNT OF COVERED CONTRACT AWARD.—Subparagraph (A) of section 7113(d)(1) of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (6 U.S.C. 112 note; Public Law 117-263) is amended by striking “\$4,000,000” and inserting “\$1,000,000”.

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. 1692.

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. 1692, the PATHS Act.

DHS other transaction agreement, or OTA, authority is an incredibly important tool in the Department’s limited arsenal of mechanisms to acquire new research and prototypes. This bill reauthorizes the Department’s OTA authority and also includes some common-sense transparency reforms to DHS’ use of OTAs.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. GUEST), for his work on this measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

H.R. 1692 would once again allow the Department of Homeland Security to use other transaction authority, or OTA, for 3 years.

Despite the efforts of Democrats in the House and Senate, DHS lost its OTA authority last year because one Senator allowed it to lapse. OTA was a vital tool that enabled DHS to work with nontraditional government contractors to more quickly obtain cutting-edge emerging technologies that addressed evolving threats.

Since September 2024, the lapse in OTA, 50 projects have been disrupted, including 1 that led to identifying fraudulent documents, improving passenger screening, and enhancing disaster response.

Furthermore, 26 projects with approximately \$20 million invested in them, taxpayer-invested money, are at the risk of being terminated by OTA at this time. These projects include projects such as border security, cybersecurity, counternarcotic security, and a few others.

The expiration of DHS’ other transaction authority essentially will mean inefficiency and waste, things that will impede the Department’s ability to develop solutions to keep our homeland safe.

It is past time, Mr. Speaker, to advance this legislation and bring back DHS’ ability to develop novel homeland security technologies.

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 Mississippi (Mr. GUEST).

Mr. GUEST. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1692, the Producing Advanced Technologies for Homeland Security Act, which I am proud to have introduced along with Congressman SHRI THANEDAR.

The Department of Homeland Security has a constantly evolving mission. To meet those threats, the Department was previously granted the authority to enter into other transactional agreements, commonly known as OTAs.

These legally binding agreements allowed the Department to engage with nontraditional contractors that would not normally do business with the Federal Government. This includes small business innovators, public universities, and other cutting-edge technological incubators that help meet the

research and development needs of the Department of Homeland Security.

These entities have produced technology that serves as a force multiplier to our Border Patrol agents and include technology that assists agents in cargo and vehicle screening that can detect illegal substances attempting to be smuggled into the United States.

The applicability and usefulness of this authority has been demonstrated recently in my home State of Mississippi, as the University of Southern Mississippi played a leading role in developing sensors for unmanned vehicles for use by both DHS and the United States Coast Guard. Unfortunately, this was allowed to expire on September 30, 2024.

My bill would reauthorize and extend the program’s OTA authority by 3 years, to 2028, while also providing additional safeguards for the American taxpayer.

The bill would also require advanced notification to Congress should the authority be used in advancement of artificial intelligence technology. Given the rapid advancement in AI, it is critical that Congress remain informed and aware of how Federal agencies are utilizing AI to advance their mission.

To ensure greater transparency, the safeguards in this bill would require DHS to report on its website any contract in excess of \$1 million, reducing the amount that was previously required to be reported from \$4 million to \$1 million.

As we look to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse, this legislation has increased transparency requirements to ensure maximum accountability to the American people.

□ 1700

Again, I thank Mr. THANEDAR for his work on this important legislation, and I appreciate Chairman GREEN and the committee staff for their work on this issue. I urge all Members to support H.R. 1692.

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

Mr. Speaker, I thank Representatives MICHAEL GUEST and SHRI THANEDAR for sponsoring this legislation. I urge all Members to restore other transaction authority to the Department of Homeland Security, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, again, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1692, 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. 1692.

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.

SECURING THE CITIES IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. GREEN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1374) to amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to make improvements to the Securing the Cities program, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1374

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 “Securing the Cities Improvement Act”.

SEC. 2. STC PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY, METRICS, AND CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT.

Section 1928 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 596b) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by striking “high-risk urban areas” and inserting “jurisdictions designated under subsection (c)”;

(2) by amending paragraph (7) of subsection (b) to read as follows:

“(7) establish performance metrics and milestones for the STC program, monitor expenditures for the program, and track the performance against program metrics and milestones; and”;

(3) in subsection (c)(1), by striking “from among high-risk urban areas under section 2003” and inserting “based on the capability and capacity of the jurisdiction relating to preparedness and response, as well as the relative threat to such jurisdiction, vulnerability of such jurisdiction, and consequences for such jurisdiction, regarding terrorist attacks and other high-consequence events utilizing nuclear or other radiological materials”; and

(4) by amending subsection (d) to read as follows:

“(d) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this subsection, the Secretary 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 a report regarding participation in the STC program, the establishment of metrics and milestones for the STC program, performance against such metrics and milestones, and plans for any changes to the STC program.”.

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 have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 1374.

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. 1374, the Securing the Cities Improvement Act.

Since the inception of DHS’ Securing the Cities program, uncertainty about standards to qualify as a high-risk area and metrics necessary to remain in the program once admitted have been unclear. This bill will direct DHS to establish appropriate performance metrics and milestones.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. CARTER from Louisiana 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.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we are here today to consider Representative CARTER’s bill, H.R. 1374, the Securing the Cities Improvement Act, or STC. This bill is essential for enhancing cities’ security against nuclear and radiological threats.

The STC program was created by the Department of Homeland Security in 2007. It began as a pilot program in high-risk cities to detect nuclear and radiological threats. Since then, it has expanded to include additional cities, offering equipment, training, technological support, and program guidance.

The program supports major events by ensuring cities are prepared for potential threats. However, its reliance on the annual Urban Area Security Initiative, or UASI, designations creates uncertainty for local governments, as the designated high-risk areas can change, and they usually do.

This bill aims to improve the program’s stability and strengthen partnerships with at-risk cities by allowing the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office to select STC cities based on their preparedness capabilities rather than UASI designations.

The bill, Mr. Speaker, also establishes performance metrics, enhances oversight of expenditures, and requires DHS to report to Congress on program participation and any further changes.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud Representative CARTER’s leadership on this measure. I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 1374, and 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 Louisiana (Mr. CARTER), who is the author of this legislation.

Mr. CARTER of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative CORREA for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my bill, the Securing the Cities Improvement Act, a critical piece of legislation designed to help us build and maintain our Nation’s security capabilities.

Specifically, this bill provides participating cities with more reliable

guidance and support from the Department of Homeland Security’s Securing the Cities program, which seeks to reduce the risk of terrorist attacks in high-risk urban areas, like my hometown of New Orleans.

I want to specifically thank Ranking Member BENNIE THOMPSON and Congressman CLAY HIGGINS for their support and for cosponsoring this bill. I also thank LOU CORREA for managing the bill today and Chairman GREEN for his leadership, as well as the Homeland Security Committee staff, especially Lauren McClain, who tirelessly led us through this effort.

The need for this legislation has been tragically underscored by the recent terrorist attacks in the city of New Orleans on New Year’s Day, which claimed 15 lives and left dozens of others injured.

In the early hours of New Year’s Day, a 42-year-old U.S. citizen from Texas drove a rented Ford F-150 pickup truck into a crowd on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter neighborhood during the city’s New Year’s Eve celebration. After crashing, he exited the vehicle and engaged in a shootout with law enforcement before being fatally shot by courageous New Orleans police officers who rushed to the scene, putting themselves in harm’s way to protect our citizens, visitors, and guests.

Prior to the pickup truck’s attack, the terrorist planted two improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, concealed within coolers at separate locations along crowded Bourbon Street. These rudimentary pipe bombs were filled with shrapnel materials, such as nails, screws, and tacks, and were designed for remote detonation using a wireless device found in his vehicle. Luckily, he was not able to detonate these bombs and cause any further carnage.

An ISIS flag was found in the truck, and the FBI confirmed that ISIS had not coordinated with the attacker but, in fact, had inspired him.

This heinous and sick act of cowardice not only shattered the lives of victims and their families but also exposed vulnerabilities in our urban security infrastructure.

While the New Orleans attack did not involve radiological or nuclear materials, it serves as a grim reminder of the evolving tactics of terrorists and the potential for more catastrophic methods used. It also underscores why continued security investments in New Orleans and other highly targeted cities with programs like Securing the Cities are so crucial.

The Department of Homeland Security launched the Securing the Cities initiative in 2007 as a pilot program to assist the New York City metro area in detecting and preventing nuclear or radiological threats. The program has since expanded and currently provides 14 municipal governments nationwide, including the city of New Orleans, with detection equipment, training, exercise support, operational and technological expertise, and programmatic assistance, which makes a huge difference.