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Bipartisan Legislation Introduced to Encourage Continuing Citizen Involvement in Fighting Terrorism

Bill Provides Immunity to Individuals Who Report Suspicious Activities

Washington, D.C. (Thursday, April 23, 2009) -- Bipartisan legislation that would provide legal protections to individuals who report suspicious activity that may reflect terrorist threats was introduced today in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Introduced in the Senate by Homeland Security Committee Ranking Member Susan Collins (R-ME) and Chairman Joe Lieberman (I-CT), and in the House by Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Peter King (R-NY) and Rep. Jim Marshall (D-GA), the bill would provide civil immunity in American courts for individuals who, acting in good faith and based on objectively reasonable suspicion, report threats to appropriate law-enforcement officials. The bill would not protect individuals who knowingly make false statements.

“An alert citizenry is our first line of defense against terrorist attacks,” said Sen. Collins. “Our laws must protect individuals from frivolous lawsuits when they report, in good faith, suspicious behavior that may indicate terrorist activity. Our safety depends on more than just police officers, intelligence analysts, and soldiers. It also depends on the alertness and civic responsibility of all Americans.”

Senator Lieberman said, “Alert citizens have an important role to play in our homeland security. We should encourage them to be observant of their surroundings and report what they may believe to be suspicious activity, without fear of legal reprisals. The policy that has proven so effective in New York City - ‘If you see something, say something’ – makes eminent sense on a national level.”

Rep. King said, “The threat of terrorism against our homeland is ongoing and real. We must continue to encourage Americans to remain vigilant and report suspicious activity. That is why in 2007 we led the effort to pass a law protecting heroic Americans from frivolous lawsuits when they report suspicious activity concerning our transportation system. The See Something, Say Something

Act of 2009 is a common sense bill that will extend that protection to vigilant Americans who report suspicious activity anywhere in the country. This bill will make America safer.”

Rep. Marshall said, “Anything we can do to encourage Americans in good faith to alert the authorities about suspicious activity is a no-brainer.”

Senators Collins and Lieberman and Rep. King included similar language in the 2007 homeland security law to protect citizens who reported threats to the nation’s transportation systems. Earlier this year, the Senate Homeland Security Committee held hearings on the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India. Many of the Committee’s witnesses during these hearings, including Charles Allen, DHS’s Chief Intelligence Officer, Donald Van Duyn, the FBI’s Chief Intelligence Officer, New York City Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, and Al Orlob, Marriott International’s Vice President for Corporate Security, endorsed the idea of expanding the 2007 law beyond the transportation sector.

The conviction in December of 2008 of five men plotting to attack and kill American soldiers at Fort Dix, N.J., was the result of a tip from a vigilant citizen, coupled with effective coordination by state and federal law enforcement officials. This incident was one of a number that highlighted the importance of alert citizens in fighting against terrorist threats.

The legislation has received the support of law enforcement and community groups, including: the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Sheriffs’ Association, the National Troopers Coalition, and the National Association of Town Watch.

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