

HOMELAND SECURITY

House Republicans Score Another Win On Detainee Policy

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by *Chris Strohm*

Republicans won overwhelming House approval Thursday of a measure that would bar anyone imprisoned at the U.S. military detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, from flying on commercial aircraft in the United States if they are released into this country.

Offered as an amendment to a larger transportation security bill, the measure drew criticism from Democratic lawmakers during floor debate, but passed the House, 412-12.

The vote handed Republicans the latest in a string of victories in their campaign to resist the Obama administration's effort to close the Guantanamo detention center and transfer detainees to the United States and other countries.

It also signaled another calculation by most Democrats that they could not risk sustained attacks from Republicans, who have accused them of embracing policies on detainees that will endanger Americans. Before the vote, a spokesman for House Minority Whip Cantor issued a statement saying, "House Republicans really don't think that letting suspected terrorists onto planes in America is good idea."

Democrats have dropped funding sought by President Obama in the pending FY09 supplemental spending to close the detention center. On Thursday, a House Appropriations subcommittee agreed to an FY10 Commerce-Justice-Science spending bill that would bar detainee transfers to the United States until the president submits a plan to Congress to do so. The bill does not include funds to close the Guantanamo facility.

The House floor amendment to the transportation bill, offered by Homeland Security ranking member **Peter King** and Homeland Security Border Subcommittee ranking member **Mark Souder**, R-Ind., would automatically place detainees released from Guantanamo on the nation's no-fly list if they are released in the country. It would apply to any detainee who was imprisoned on or after Jan. 1, 2009, including any determined by federal authorities not to be a security threat.

Democrats initially balked at the amendment, arguing it was unnecessary because the underlying bill included language that would place detainees on the no-fly list based on a determination by the president. Republicans argued that the language in the bill was too weak.

"With the overwhelming passage of this amendment, I am encouraged that Democrats are beginning to see the serious homeland security implications of President Obama's decision to close Guantanamo and possibly release dangerous detainees into the United States," King said.

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The underlying bill, which was approved 397-25, is unusual because it is the first to authorize programs and spending for the Transportation Security Administration since the agency was created in 2001.

The bill would create programs, advisory groups and grant spending to beef up security at the nation's airports and rail systems, as well as when it comes to trucking hazardous materials. Overall, the bill would authorize \$11.4 billion in new discretionary spending over the next five years.

Lawmakers from both parties, as well as labor and business groups, praised the bill's passage.

"This legislation is the result of months of bipartisan effort with significant contributions from stakeholders across the board," Homeland Security Chairman **Bennie Thompson** said.

He added that the bill "steers TSA on a course to becoming an effective agency that works to enhance security in all our transportation sectors, partners with key stakeholders, and does a better job of utilizing technology, such as biometrics, to address gaps in security."

Before the final vote, lawmakers voted 310-118 to approve an amendment that would prohibit TSA from using whole-body imaging machines at primary security checkpoints at airports. The machines could be used for secondary screening of passengers.

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