

House Approves Bilirakis Measure to Expand Overseas Terrorist Detection Program

WASHINGTON (25 June) – Late Wednesday evening the U.S. House of Representatives approved H.R. 2892, the Fiscal Year 2010 Department of Homeland Security Act, which included an amendment sponsored by U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) to enhance our nation’s visa screening capabilities overseas to keep terrorists out of the United States.

“We must be proactive in strengthening our homeland security efforts,” Bilirakis said. “I have long been concerned about inadequacies in the screening process and background checks conducted on those seeking temporary admission to our country.”

The Bilirakis amendment, which the House approved by a vote of 422 to 6, increases funding for the Visa Security Program by \$1.7 million, which is an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) program that places security officers at high-risk overseas posts to carefully investigate and scrutinize visa applicants. Currently, Immigration and Customs Enforcement operates 14 visa security units around the world. The Visa Security Program is a vital terrorist detection tool which allows ICE to aggressively examine visa applications to identify potential terrorists before they gain entry to the United States.

“The increased funding will provide ICE with the necessary resources to establish an additional visa security unit immediately, and accelerate the addition of several new units overseas in the coming years,” Bilirakis added.

In December of 2007, Bilirakis introduced the Student Visa Security Improvement Act, which would improve the background checks conducted on student visa applicants and enhance America’s ability to ensure, once in the country, foreign students are abiding by the terms of their visas.