

The Tampa Tribune | Bilirakis Is Homeland Security Watchdog

By Billy House, The Tampa Tribune

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis of Palm Harbor has been picked to be his party's top congressional watchdog over the Department of Homeland Security.

Bilirakis is to be named today as the ranking Republican on the Democrat-controlled House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Management, Investigations and Oversight.

"Not flashy," Bilirakis said of the subcommittee, but important in terms of the nation's security.

In his new role, Bilirakis will investigate and report on the department's border security, anti-terrorism and disaster-response efforts, contracting and purchasing decisions, and its personnel, management and labor issues.

In short, Bilirakis' job will be trying to keep tabs, as a member of the smaller, opposition party in Congress, on whether the department under the administration of President Barack Obama is operating as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The massive department headed by newly confirmed Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano includes the Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Secret Service, Coast Guard, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Bilirakis will lead two other Republicans on the investigations and oversight subcommittee, which will have about six Democrats.

It is one of six subpanels of the overall Homeland Security Committee, controlled by Democrats, 21 seats to 13 seats. The top Republican on the overall committee is Peter King of New York, who picked Bilirakis to lead the party on the oversight subpanel.

Why Bilirakis?

"He's the right guy to keep a close eye on the Department of Homeland Security in this critical time of transition, and he'll help guide some important bills in the coming years," King said. "Gus will also provide great perspective as the only member on the committee from Florida, a state with a lot of critical infrastructure, the Port of Tampa being just one example."

King will assign a Republican committee staff member to help Bilirakis in his subcommittee work. The congressman will also rely on input from his own legislative director.

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