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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. HIRONO).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
September 14, 2009.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MAZIE K. HIRONO to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2009, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

CARGO SCREENING SOLUTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Madam Speaker, last week marked the eighth anniversary of 9/11. Congress should honor the memory of that tragedy by solidifying its homeland security agenda. That means taking the right steps to keep the Nation safe, free and prosperous. At the same time, Congress should resist initiatives that do not actually improve security and impair international trade.

The international maritime community has long voiced their concerns with the blanket application of the 9/11 law mandating 100 percent scanning of all U.S.-bound containers from more than 700 ports around the world. The countries that have raised concern include United States allies such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Singapore.

H.R. 1, implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007, called the public's attention to issues of supply chain security and the potential threats faced by this Nation and all of those with a stake in this supply chain.

One hundred percent container scanning as a security tool may seem like an appealing way to ensure container security, but it is fraught with various operational and technical challenges. In addition, it provides a false sense of security, as the effectiveness of the analysts become degraded, given that there will be information overload and desensitization of the analysts.

Requiring 100 percent scanning of all in-bound sea containers, more than 11 million containers annually, may be well-intentioned, but it is not feasible, given the current technology. A 100 percent scanning requirement could simply strangle commerce, have a significantly damaging impact on American manufacturing and cost a lot of jobs.

The international flow of containers will also be slowed as a result of the severe bottleneck in busy ports. Similarly, U.S. ports such as Long Beach, New Jersey and Los Angeles will have their congestion problems exacerbated if the international maritime community makes similar reciprocal demands on the United States.

One other important point: The backup in cargo traffic caused by 100 percent scanning could inadvertently cause a higher security risk. Major delays in inspecting and processing containers would put the cargo in greater risk of tampering at the docks. 100 percent scanning will also bring about huge costs to port operators, shippers and ocean carriers. Costs incurred through such a requirement will eventually filter down to the very constituents that we are trying to protect. This will be essentially hurtful as consumers deal with rising prices and a weak economy.

U.S. manufacturers, large and small, have a substantial interest and concern regarding the security of our Nation's ports and the safe transport of their products. This legislation would levy counterproductive Federal mandates on industry, unnecessarily increase costs, cause massive delays and disruptions in the global supply chain and ultimately cost American jobs.

More can and should be done to secure our borders and supply chains against terrorist activities. H.R. 1, however, will impose additional cost burdens on the United States economy, both small and large, with the establishment of cargo security inspection protocols that rely simply on unproven technologies and that do not ensure security improvements that are commensurate with the expenses that would be incurred to implement these programs. This legislation will add uncertainty and costs to the international supply chain, severely impacting the flow of legitimate trade, but with little demonstrative improvement in security.

My colleagues, there is an alternative approach which has broader international consensus, and that is a risk-based approach, coupled with the concept of total supply security along the chain. Such an approach, where all stakeholders in the supply chain undertake security measures to protect their cargo, is less duplicative and more holistic. A layered, risk-based, targeted approach to cargo security, rather than a one-size-fits-all, such as in H.R. 1, will provide more effective security with better utilization of limited resources.

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