

rated bridge with more traffic, greater relative importance to the rest of the system, and overall more need for investment. This bill would create yet another level of bureaucracy to a bridge program over-burdened with red tape, as State risk-management plans will have to be approved by the Department of Transportation.

The requirements for the risk management system set forth in H.R. 3999 are vague and unspecific. However, there is a wide concern among State departments of transportation that they will be interpreted by FHWA to force one-size-fits-all Federal standards that ignore local considerations and variations in risk factors across the country, such as seismic retrofit.

States are already using a highly effective bridge management system to address risk when making State-wide bridge investment decisions; this bill will disrupt these efforts.

In closing I will reiterate that I fully agree that the current Highway Bridge Program needs work, but so does the entire Federal Highway Program and I believe we need a comprehensive solution. I look forward to working with my colleagues to that end.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, democracy and the rule of law have become firmly entrenched in many Central and Eastern European nations. We must be forthright and firm in our support for the continued independence and territorial integrity of the still fledgling CEE democracies.

The political and economic transformation of the region is nothing short of breathtaking. After years of untold suffering under Soviet rule, these countries have boldly embraced common transatlantic values of liberty and democracy with profound and positive consequences.

Internal reforms, including increased government accountability and efforts to eradicate corruption, have spurred economic transformations reaching deep within each country. Respect for human rights and democratic reforms have invigorated civil society. The progress and achievements in the region are inspirational, and I join with the 22 million Americans of Central and Eastern European heritage in taking great pride in the democratization of these former Soviet bloc countries.

But the great strides in freedom and democracy in the region are under threat. Russia's recent military incursion into the neighboring country of Georgia was a dramatic wake-up call. Some have suggested the incursion is a harbinger of Russian desires to limit the sovereignty and pro-Western orientation of vulnerable neighboring countries. I hope that is not the case.

Just last month, the leaders of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Ukraine stood together with Georgian

President Mikheil Saakashvili to demonstrate solidarity in the face of Russia's incursion. The United States pledged its support for the democratically elected Government of Georgia and for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. European leaders helped broker a cease-fire agreement. The United States, Europe, and the CEE nations must continue to stand together in the face of Russian aggression and interference in the region.

Nevertheless, as disturbing as Russia's behavior has been, we must find a way to step back from the path of confrontation with Russia. It makes better sense to find common ground than to engage in confrontation. This does not mean indulgence of Russia's recent actions. On the contrary, we must find a way to work with Russia without ceding freedom and democracy in the region.

Let me be clear. I am deeply committed to the continued freedom, democracy, and independence of the Central and Eastern European nations. At the same time, I fully support the democratization of Russia. Ultimately, we need to find a way to improve relations with Russia, but the effort cannot be one-sided.

It is in Russia's own economic interest to step up to the plate and be a positive member of the international community. Our relationship with Russia may be complicated, but we can find common ground in working together to strengthen global security, economic stability, and democracy. Moreover, the United States needs Russia as a partner in building a peaceful and prosperous Europe.

The United States does not have to choose between the Central and Eastern European countries and Russia. We should be able to form real partnerships with both.

DOMESTIC INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS POST 9/11

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, it has been more than 7 years since al-Qaida attacked us at home. There are many lessons those attacks should have taught us, many things we should have been doing as a nation since that date which we have yet to do. These post-9/11 gaps in our efforts and strategies need as much if not more attention today as they did on September 12, 2001. The largest gap we face is a strategic gap between what we should have done and what this administration elected to do in response to the tragic events of 9/11. The administration chose to attack Iraq rather than complete the mission in Afghanistan—where the 9/11 attacks were hatched—and address al-Qaida's expanding influence in northern Africa, Southeast Asia, and beyond. Those threats are real and have the continuing potential to manifest themselves again in disastrous ways here at home and around the world.

There are other gaps—failures by this administration to address the real

challenges of our post-9/11 world. We have created a gap in the readiness of our military. Our National Guard, an integral part of any large disaster response, has been severely strained. We continue to have insufficient intelligence and information resources posted abroad. We have insufficient diplomatic personnel, with insufficient language and other cultural experience, to cover the many places in the world where our national security interests require that we know more—and interact with those who know us least. And while I applaud the efforts of this administration to encourage more of our citizens to engage in international volunteer programs, there is room for much more to be done to strengthen our image and our impact abroad through citizen outreach and private diplomacy. In a post-9/11 world, these continuing gaps pose real threats to our security at home, and we cannot ignore them at the expense of a strategically misguided and perilously expensive ongoing military presence in Iraq.

Closer to home, we are now beginning to suffer serious challenges to our economic stability and longer term economic outlook. We are squandering our wealth and failing to invest in our economic future and our domestic security. Osama bin Laden's stated goal was to bankrupt America. Well, the cost of our presence in Iraq may ultimately exceed the massive cost proposed to bail out our failed financial systems. And what do we have to show for the hundreds of billions spent in Iraq? What do Americans have as a return on their investment? A more perilous world in which al-Qaida has a safe haven in Pakistan, our power and influence are diminished and our military might is badly overextended.

So where do we go from here? We go where Americans have always gone in times of challenge. We will take up the challenge we face head-on and work to close the gaps we face in the fabric of our domestic security.

Here at home, we continue to have critical gaps in our domestic security, in our infrastructure, in our first responder systems. We still have not deployed an effective system to prevent the smuggling of radiological materials through our ports. We have not done everything we can to secure chemical facilities that could be the source of materials for domestic car bombs like the ones we have seen cause so much damage in Baghdad. We have not fully implemented the command system needed to ensure that first responders know how to work together across federal, state and local government.

We have also failed to establish the military forces needed to conduct medical triage, search and rescue, and decontamination in the wake of a WMD incident at home. I tried to offer an amendment to the 2009 Defense authorization bill that would have mandated that these forces be established by the end of 2009 and that they be maintained at the highest levels of readiness. This