

## Securing the Homeland is Challenging -- August 2005

By: Delaware Congressman Mike Castle

Protecting our homeland is not easy -- plain and simple. There is a lot to keep tabs on, from our airports and planes to the thousands of miles of rail tracks, to our ports, chemical and nuclear plants and buses and trucks. That is why there is no sure-fire solution or solutions. Our enemies and their tactics are ever changing. Just a few weeks ago, we witnessed the horrific bombings on the London subways -- once thought of to be the safest in Europe and maybe even the world. This tragedy That just shows that no matter the extent of the security measures, there are always vulnerabilities that can be exploited by terrorists.

It has been almost four years since the worst terrorist attacks on our nation. Yet not one American will ever forget where they were on September 11, 2001, what they were doing, where their loved ones were or unfortunately, the feelings they had when they learned a loved one was missing or had been killed. As a nation, our response to that day was one of great patriotism and as a government our response was one of determination -- to uproot the terrorists and to protect our nation.

We have come a long way in those four years. We have doubled funding for protections defenses here at home; we have increased safety measures at airports and on planes; we have begun implementing the US - VISIT system to track visitors to the United States; we have increase d training for of our consulates and other front-line personnel overseas; and we have established an emergency alert system so all Americans are aware of the threats and threat levels facing the United States.

Yet, we have a long way to go. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff recently outlined his Department's the path forward from the federal government's point of view. His plans include: increasing overall preparedness, particularly for catastrophic events; creating better transportation security systems to move people and cargo more securely; strengthening border security and interior enforcement and reforming immigration processes; enhancing information sharing with our partners (states, foreign counterparts, etc); improving financial management at the Department of Homeland Security; and realigning the department Department to maximize mission performance.

I am very supportive of these goals; however, I also have some ideas of my own:

- Increased funding for rail security -- In the wake of the London and Madrid train attacks, it is clear that our 140,000 miles of track are at risk. Yet the federal government spends \$70 on aviation security for every dollar spent on rail security. In other words, s Since 9-11, \$18 billion has been spent on aviation security, while only \$250 million has been spent on rail security. I am also waiting for the results of a study by the Government Accountability Office, which I requested in late 2003. The intent of this study is to compare I requested comparing U.S. rail security to that in other countries, like Japan and Singapore, to see analyze how we can improve security procedures.

- Improving travel documents and procedures at the border -- There is no question that procedures to falsify ing travel documents like passports and drivers' license s have has become an art form. I recently succeeded in offering an amendment to legislation to require information about persons convicted of using false drivers' licenses at airports to be included in aviation security screening databases. But we We must also look at ensuring all U.S. visas have computer-accessible biometric identifiers, such as fingerprint recognition, hand geometry, facial recognition or iris scanning.

- Extending the TWIC program nationwide -- The Port of Wilmington recently participated in a pilot program, the Transportation Workers Identification Credential Program program (TWIC), to require all port workers to carry identification cards with biometric identifiers and to undergo criminal background checks. Security at ports is considered one of the biggest holes in our national security because of the threat of nuclear weapons or a biological attack. This type of program must be extended nationwide.

There is no question about it, we must get this right. We must examine every possible solution or approach to securing our homeland - including communication, coordination and cooperation among agencies, states, and political parties. We have to invest in human and financial capital and ensure we do not have a patchwork quilt approach to homeland security. The stakes are high. The safety of our nation depends on it.