

## Patriot Act is Vital in the War against Terrorism -- January 2006

By: Delaware Congressman Mike Castle

Four years after enactment of the USA PATRIOT Act, Congress has improved the legislation to permanently authorize 14 of the Act's 16 expiring provisions and extend the other two until 2009. With my support, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 3199 before adjourning for the year, but unfortunately the Senate was only able to pass a five-week extension. If Congress does not act, we risk reversing essential intelligence-sharing that the USA PATRIOT Act has so successfully fostered.

The PATRIOT Act has proved essential in fighting the War on Terror since its overwhelming passage after the attacks of September 11, 2001. While landmark reforms in our ability to gather and share intelligence have been made, there are some who have expressed concern that Congress is rushing to reauthorize the expiring provisions.

Even though the Justice Department's independent Inspector General has found no abuses of PATRIOT Act authorities, Congress has taken many steps to protect the delicate balance between security and liberty that Americans so greatly value. In 2005 alone, Congressional Committees held 23 hearings and heard testimony from more than 60 witnesses before considering this reauthorization.

As a result of these hearings, important modifications were made in H.R. 3199 to the USA Patriot Act to further protect civil liberties and to prevent future abuses by enhancing Congressional and Judicial oversight. H.R. 3199 expands civil liberties protections in over a dozen areas. Thirty safeguards to protect privacy and civil liberties were included such as enabling those who receive national security letters to consult an attorney and challenge the request in court; requiring high-level Justice Department sign-off before investigators may ask a court to order production of certain sensitive records, such as those from a library; and requiring the FBI to describe the target of a "roving wiretap" with sufficient specificity to ensure that only a single individual is targeted.

The Senate must now act swiftly to approve the reauthorization of these important provisions. The sharing and cooperation among government agencies that has armed our intelligence and law enforcement officers with the necessary tools to protect the American people is far too important to let it lapse.