

CASTLE, DENT SEEK TO REPATRIATE CRIMINAL ALIENS -- April 10, 2008

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, U.S. Rep. Michael N. Castle (R-DE) and U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA-15), introduced the House companion of The Accountability in Immigrant Repatriation (AIR) Act of 2008, which would suspend visa issuances to countries that refuse to accept deported aliens from the United States. Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), introduced the AIR Act (S. 2720) in the Senate in March and joined in hosting today's press conference to explain the need for this legislation.

As of February 2008, eight countries—Laos, Iran, Eritrea, Vietnam, Jamaica, China, India, and Ethiopia—are refusing to repatriate a total of over 139,000 aliens. More than 18,000 of them are convicted criminals who have been released back onto American streets.

The Castle-Dent and Specter proposals would improve our immigration enforcement system by making it possible to suspend all pending visa applications from countries that refuse to repatriate criminals and deportees. The legislation would also direct the State Department to withhold funds under the Foreign Assistance Act to countries that persist in this refusal.

The bill would require reports to Congress every 90 days on the countries which inhibit repatriation. Receipt of the report automatically triggers denial of foreign aid as well as suspension of visa issuances to the listed countries. The President would be given the option of requesting a waiver for the sanctions if doing so is deemed to be in our national interests.

"Shockingly, criminal aliens who have served time in U.S. prisons are routinely released onto our streets after their home countries refuse to take them back," said Congressman Castle. "This represents a serious loop-hole in our immigration system and I believe our legislation, combined with efforts to expand border enforcement and target fraudulent identification documents, can improve security and provide for a smarter use of taxpayer dollars."

"Streamlining the deportation process and insisting that countries repatriate illegal aliens who have been convicted of crimes of violence will free substantial Immigration and Customs Enforcement resources, which can then be devoted to improving identification and reporting of deportable criminal aliens in federal, state or local custody," Senator Specter said. "My proposal works to stop criminal aliens from being released onto our streets and helps to close the government's credibility gap on immigration enforcement."

"In Pennsylvania, there are as many as a thousand criminal aliens that could end up back on the streets if their home countries refuse to take them back," Congressman Dent said. "There must be consequences for not respecting our rule of law. America is a land of opportunity, but it's not a dumping ground for lawbreakers."