

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Brian Higgins

Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence

Joint Hearing: “Safeguarding our Nation’s Surface Transportation Systems Against Evolving Terrorist Threats”

September 17, 2015

The attacks of 9/11 focused and exploited the weaknesses inherent in aviation security to perpetrate one of the worst attacks on U.S. soil. However, we must remember other modes of transportation have been and remain a top priority for transnational terrorist groups worldwide and their affiliates.

There have been devastating terrorist attacks against all modes of surface transportation across the globe including train bombings in Belarus, India, Russia, Spain and the United Kingdom, and most recently, a shooting on a train traveling from Amsterdam to Paris. While there has not been a successful transportation-related attack by al Qaeda in the United States since 9/11, there have been a number of thwarted plots.

My concern with this issue led me to introduce legislation in July titled the “Know CBRN Threats to Transportation Act.” The Department of Energy plans to begin transporting highly enriched uranium liquid from Canada to South Carolina next year. The Department of Energy proposes to transport this waste, which is far more radioactive than spent nuclear fuel, across the Northern Border at the Peace Bridge, crossing through several states and municipalities before reaching South Carolina.

An attack on one of these trucks crossing the Peace Bridge could contaminate the Great Lakes, which contain 84% of North America's surface fresh water, with highly radioactive material. Moreover, an attack on a truck moving through heavily populated areas throughout the United States would have obvious and devastating consequences.

Despite these risks, the Department of Energy is about to begin importing highly radioactive material, which has never before been shipped in this manner, using outdated, pre- 9/11 information that does not reflect the threats we face today.

My bill, which was advanced through my Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee today unanimously, would direct the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis to conduct an assessment of the risks associated with the transportation of chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological materials.

The bill also mandates that the Office of Intelligence and Analysis consult and share information with the heads of other federal agencies, including the Transportation Security Administration so that the assessment is informed by the most current information about homeland security threats.

As my bill continues to move through The House and Senate, I hope to raise awareness of the security risks and protections needed within surface transportation sector of our country.