

**Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Prepared Floor Remarks in Support of:**

**H.R. 251, the “Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards Program Extension Act”**

**January 8, 2019**

Unless Congress acts expeditiously, authority to regulate these high-risk facilities will expire in a matter of days. We cannot let that happen. The risk of a terrorist attack on a chemical facility is not conjecture - it is a credible threat echoed by every Homeland Security Secretary since 2005.

Federal and state law enforcement officers have uncovered multiple plots aimed at chemical facilities – including after the 9/11 attacks, when it came to light that the hijackers had also scouted chemical plants.

National security experts from former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff to President Obama have expressed concern that a terrorist could seek to penetrate a chemical facility to carry out a weapons of mass destruction attack.

CFATS had a bumpy start but, over time, and with the stability of a long term authorization in 2014, CFATS has developed into a security program that is making the U.S. *demonstrably* safer. Don’t take my word for it – the data speaks for itself.

Since CFATS was created, the number of chemical facilities designated as “high risk” in the U.S. has dropped by half. This achievement means that communities near chemical plants are safer.

Still, like with any program, there are areas where it could be strengthened. The two-year extension sought under this Act is needed to give the House and Senate ample time to come together to address oversight findings to improve the program.

It is unfortunate that, in the waning days of the previous Congress, bipartisan House efforts to provide the regulated community with confidence that the CFATS security regime would continue were rebuffed by a couple of Senators who took the public position that the program should be completely ended unless it was changed in the ways they'd like.

In fact, they said as much in a letter to House and Senate leadership on October 23, 2018: “If Congress fails to reform the CFATS program, we believe the program should expire and not continue to be reauthorized via annual appropriations.”

The approach they took was eerily similar to the one the President is now taking - as he sets a partial government shutdown in motion to try and compel Congress to agree to providing nearly \$6 billion in funding for a border wall.

The Secretary of Homeland Security wrote to Congress in November urging for a short-term reauthorization. As Secretary Nielsen notes, “if the program were to lapse as a result of the current sun-setting provision, it would increase the risk to our country and create uncertainty across the chemical industry.” The Secretary and I may not agree on everything, but we agree on this – we cannot let this critical national security program fall victim to this political game of chicken.

This bill would allow the Department of Homeland Security to continue working high risk chemical facility owners and operators throughout the U.S. to guard dangerous chemicals against malicious actors.

For proof of how grave this threat is, one need look no further than West, Texas where, in 2013, a perpetrator set fire to a fertilizer plant, causing an explosion that leveled an entire town. More than a dozen first responders and civilians lost their lives in the blast.

Allowing the authority to lapse would throw away the progress that has been made since 2014, and needlessly make our communities less secure.