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Bush signs bill carrying out 9/11 Commission recommendations

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By Associated Press

ASHINGTON (AP) - President Bush signed legislation Friday that intensifies the anti-terrorism effort at home, shifting money to high-risk states and cities and expanding scrutiny of air and sea cargo.

The bill elevates the importance of risk factors in determining which states and cities get federal security funds. That would mean more money for such cities as New York and Washington. It also puts money into a new program to ensure that security officials at every level can communicate with each other.

It requires screening of all cargo on passenger planes within three years and sets a five-year goal of scanning all container ships for nuclear devices before they leave foreign ports.

Bush signed the bill into law in the Oval Office before heading to the FBI to meet and have lunch with counterterrorism advisers and then talk with members of his homeland security team.

He is meeting this weekend at Camp David, Md., with Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan, where South Korean hostages are being held by the Taliban and where the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is considered a haven for the al-Qaida terrorist network.

The measure carries out unfulfilled recommendations that the Sept. 11 Commission made three years ago in the wake of the terror attacks on the U.S. homeland in 2001. It was passed in the House on a 371-40 vote and 85-8 in the Senate. Republicans generally backed the bill while stressing their own administration's success in stopping another major terrorist attack.

The legislation also:

-Authorizes more than \$4 billion for four years for rail, transit and bus security.

-Requires the screening of all container ships in foreign ports within five years, but give the Homeland Security secretary authority to delay implementation.

-Establishes a new electronic travel authorization system to improve security for visitors from countries participating in the visa waiver program.

-Strengthens a board that oversees privacy and civil liberties issues.

-Establishes a voluntary certification program to assess whether private entities comply with voluntary preparedness standards.

-Requires the president and Congress to disclose total spending requested and approved for the intelligence community.

-Provides civil immunity to those who, in good faith, report suspicious activities that threaten the safety and security of passengers on a transportation system or that could be an act of terrorism.

-Requires the president to confirm that Pakistan is making progress combatting al-Qaida and Taliban elements within its borders before the United States provides aid to the country.


Completion of the bill, six months after the House passed its original version on the first day of the current Congress, was a major victory for Democrats who have seen some of their other priorities - immigration and energy reform and stem cell research funding - thwarted by GOP and presidential resistance and House-Senate differences.

The independent 9/11 Commission in 2004 issued 41 recommendations covering domestic security, intelligence gathering and foreign policy. Congress and the White House followed through on some, including creating a director of national intelligence, tightening land border screening and cracking down on terrorist financing. Democrats, after taking over control of Congress, promised to make completing the list a top priority.

Former Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission, said with enactment of the bill that some 80 percent of the panel's recommendations will have been met. According to Hamilton, one shortcoming of the bill is that it fails to carry out the commission's recommendation that Congress streamline its own overlapping setup for monitoring intelligence and homeland security matters.

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