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9TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

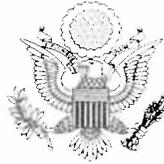
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE

ASSISTANT REPUBLICAN WHIP



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0909
January 21, 2010

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The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

I am writing as Ranking Member of the Homeland Security Committee's Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight to obtain information about the Visa Security Program (VSP), which places Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) personnel overseas to proactively investigate and review visa applications to identify potential terrorist or criminal suspects before they are issued visas and gain entry to our country.

Congress recognized the importance of improving visa security by enacting Section 428(e) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-296), which authorized the Department of Homeland Security to assign personnel to consular posts overseas to review visa applications prior to final adjudication. The Visa Security Program created by this provision was intended to ensure that highly-trained agents with specialized knowledge in terrorism and security would provide enhanced capabilities to our first-line of defense against those who want to gain access to the United States for illegitimate purposes.

I am greatly troubled that expansion of this vital terrorist screening program does not appear to be a priority of the Administration, especially since Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab reportedly received a visa in London, which does not have a Visa Security Unit. Although ICE has a plan for deploying additional Visa Security Units in the coming years, the Administration's Fiscal Year 2010 budget request only included funding to continue visa security activities at existing high-risk locations, not expand these terrorist detection capabilities.

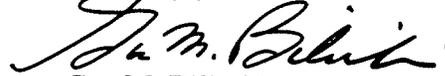
That is why I sponsored an amendment to H.R. 2892, the Fiscal Year 2010 Homeland Security Appropriations Act, which shifted \$1.7 million from administrative functions at the Department to be used solely to open additional Visa Security Units. The House approved this amendment by a vote of 423 to 6 on June 24, 2009. The final conference agreement on this bill (Public Law 111-83) ultimately included \$500,000 for this purpose.

I would appreciate your answers to the following questions, which will help me determine the most appropriate way to effectively bolster this critical homeland security capability to enhance visa security.

1. Why are Visa Security Units located in only 14 of the more than 200 State Department posts overseas?
2. How many locations has the Department of Homeland Security identified as high-risk areas in which these units should be located?
3. What is the Department's timeline for establishing units in these locations?
4. Has the Department encountered resistance from the Department of State that has slowed the establishment of new Visa Security Units at locations identified as high-risk? If so, which locations and what are those objections?
5. Has the Department established a strategic plan to guide visa security operations and developed and maintained performance data to demonstrate the impact of the Visa Security Program, as recommended by the Government Accountability Office in 2005 (GAO-05-801)?
6. What role do Visa Security Units play in evaluating new information that might lead to the revocation of a visa?

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact my Deputy Chief of Staff, Jerry White, at (202) 225-5755 if you have any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely yours,



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress

GB:jw