

## Rep. Bilirakis Introduces Legislation to Strengthen Foreign Student Visa Security

WASHINGTON (Dec. 13) — On Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) introduced the Student Visa Security Improvement Act, which would improve the background checks conducted on student visa applicants and enhance America's ability to ensure, once in the country, foreign students are abiding by the terms of their visas.

"After taking a long hard look at this program, I believe that existing guidelines for issuing and tracking foreign students need improvement," said Bilirakis, who serves on the House Committee on Homeland Security. "The legislation I introduced today would more effectively screen foreign students prior to final adjudication overseas, and require the students to regularly check in with their academic institution once stateside."

The Student Visa Security Improvement Act has two primary components — screening and tracking. The screening component will require DHS personnel who are assisting consular sections in the visa issuance process to review all applications for student visas prior to final adjudication. The tracking component will require more vigilant monitoring of foreign students once they are in the country by improving the Student and Exchange Visitor Program and the system that keeps track of them.

The 9/11 Commission wrote in its final report that "had the immigration system set a higher bar for determining whether individuals are who or what they claim to be . . . it could have potentially excluded, removed, or come into contact with several hijackers who did not appear to meet the terms for admitting short-term visitors."

This legislation was developed following the Aug. 4, 2007 arrest and subsequent indictment on explosives charges of two foreign-born University of South Florida (USF) students, one of whom reportedly had a prior criminal background in his home country of Egypt. A third student, Karim Moussaoui, was arrested this morning on a related gun charge.

"Clearly in the case of the USF students, there were vulnerabilities discovered in the way we screen foreign students here on visas," said Bilirakis. "We have to provide our nation's universities with the guidance and tools they need so that they are not left exposed dealing with a problem that is the responsibility of the federal government. Additionally, we need to support the health and continued growth of the foreign student visitor program by ensuring that we prohibit those who are here for the wrong reasons from getting here in the first place."

Original cosponsors for this legislation include: Reps. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-Fla.), Vern Buchanan (R-Fla.), Eric Cantor (R-Va.), Duncan Hunter (R-Calif), Ed Perlmutter (D-Colo.), Peter Roskam (R-Ill.), Mark Souder (R-Ind.), and Bill Young (R-Fla.).