



NASCAR DUD

GUEST OBSERVER

By Daniel J. Kaniewski

House Homeland Panel Needs Own Jurisdiction

Secretary Tom Ridge recently marked the one-year anniversary of the Department of Homeland Security with the release of a strategic plan for his agency. One year after the creation of the House Homeland Security Committee, the panel has no strategic plan of its own. With an uncertain future, the select committee faces a struggle to maintain its legitimacy.

Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) should be applauded for taking the initiative to create the select committee just before the 108th Congress. Unfortunately, because the committee was provided with little jurisdiction it is unable to effectively lead homeland security efforts in the House. As Congressional scholars Christopher Deering and Steven Smith noted in their book "Committees in Congress," "Sharing jurisdiction with other committees directly undermines the authority of a committee." Since the committee's only legislative authority is over the department's enabling legislation, the committee has received few bill referrals and is struggling to conduct significant legislative business — the lifeblood of committees.

Case in point: Out of dozens of homeland security "legislative accomplishments" listed on the Speaker's Web site, the select committee had jurisdiction over only four bills. Of these, the only exclusive jurisdiction the select committee had was over a technical corrections bill, and none of the bills has become law.

The select committee's success in overseeing the department is equally unimpressive. Speaking to the oversight function of Congress, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) voiced just days before the president announced the creation of the department in June 2002 that "the minute it becomes a Cabinet position, his butt will be here all day long, every day," referring to Secretary Ridge.

His sentiment has largely held true. While Homeland Security Chairman Christopher Cox (R-Calif.) points to the 35 hearings his committee has held during the past year as a major accomplishment, an independent search yielded an additional 65 hearings on home-

land security before other House authorizing committees. With the select committee having held only 35 percent of the House's homeland security hearings, it clearly does not have a monopoly on homeland security oversight in the House.

While this data is discouraging for those who understand the need for a committee and department to be linked, we do have reason to be optimistic as the system is only half-broken. After all, homeland security appropriations were consolidated in the last session. The Speaker needs to finish the task at hand and give the select committee the same jurisdictional primacy accorded to the appropriators.

The select committee, despite its relatively powerless status, does have authority to report to the Rules Committee by Sept. 30 with a recommendation on whether (and if so, how) Congress should be restructured. To this end, the Homeland Security subcommittee on rules held three hearings, the latest in September 2003. The 10 witnesses who testified during these hearings were unanimous in the recommendation: A permanent committee with legislative jurisdiction is necessary. The witnesses were no lightweights; they included leading Congressional scholars from academe and think tanks and former Speakers Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Tom Foley (D-Wash.).

Based on this testimony and committee members' statements, it seems obvious that the select committee will recommend a permanent committee vested with legislative authority. Unfortunately the rules subcommittee has sat idle since its last hearing six months ago, and the full committee appears to be in no hurry to release its restructuring recommendation until its deadline six months from now.

This unfortunate inaction will only delay the implementation of a plan for the next Congress. It will take time to convince turf-conscious committee chairmen that a permanent committee with real authority makes sense. With the clock ticking, the committee should take the initiative and release its plan for the future, just as Secretary Ridge did for his department last week.

Daniel J. Kaniewski is deputy director of the George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute, where Secretary Ridge unveiled his strategic plan.



Members who have appeared most often on Sunday news shows in 2004



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Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.)	6	0	0	2	3	1
Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.)	5	1	1	1	2	0
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Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.)	3	0	0	0	2	1
Rep. Christopher Cox (R-Calif.)	2	0	0	0	2	0
Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.)	2	1	0	0	1	0
Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.)	2	0	0	0	2	0
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