

For Immediate Release:
October 4, 2004

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Congress Should Heed 9/11 Commission, Enact Measures that Enhance Our Security, and Not Be Derailed by Poison Pills

Washington, DC – Both the House and Senate this week will vote on bills intended to implement the recommendations of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission. Yet, the 9/11 Commission has taken starkly different positions on the bills produced in each body. While endorsing the Senate measure as a “giant step forward,” the Commission last week urged House Republican Leaders to remove certain “controversial” provisions from their bill, H.R. 10. The 9/11 Commissioners have indicated that these provisions go significantly beyond their recommendations and threaten speedy passage of the bill. They cite special concerns with the House bill’s immigration-related measures.

The controversial immigration-related provisions, as marked-up by the House Judiciary and Government Reform Committees, would undermine the availability of basic due process, allow the removal of persons without administrative or judicial review, further restrict asylum eligibility, authorize deportations while appeals remain pending, prohibit acceptance of consular identification cards by federal government entities, link immigration status to driver’s licenses issuance, and relax the standards for sending foreigners to countries where they could be tortured. The House has not addressed most of these issues: they have voted down those they have addressed. We will soon learn if House Republican leadership heeds the Commission: Representative Hastert (R-IL) is expected shortly to unveil the measure that will go to the House floor for an expected Wednesday vote.

The bill that the Senate currently is debating, S. 2845, introduced by Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) does not contain these poison pills and has been endorsed by the 9/11 Commission and, most recently, President Bush. However, several Senators are seeking to attach to this legislation controversial measures that echo the troublesome House provisions. These measures stand in contrast to an amendment Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) have proposed that include some important and helpful additions to immigration and border-security initiatives.

AILA urges House leadership to heed the 9/11 Commission’s admonitions and repudiate the use of this legislation to advance a divisive, anti-immigrant agenda, not the security needs of our nation.

AILA calls on the Senate to continue its bipartisan work of implementing the 9/11 Commission’s recommendations and pass legislation that implements the Commission’s vision that “Our borders and immigration system, including law enforcement, ought to send a message of welcome, tolerance, and justice to members of the immigrant communities in the United States and in their countries of origin. We should reach out to immigrant communities.”

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