

Received(Date): 19 SEP 2002 21:36:00

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Senator Miller's remarks to reporters in his press conference with Senator
Gramm
earlier today re. Homeland Security.

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U.S. Senator Zell Miller (D-GA)
Press Conference with Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX)
Homeland Security Legislation
U.S. Capitol
September 19, 2002

I am very glad to be here today, teamed up again with my good friend, Senator Phil Gramm. It's always a pleasure to work with him.

When the president asked if I would support his homeland security bill, I did not hesitate. Because I believe in a time of war you give the Commander in chief the tools he needs to do the job, protect this country and keep Americans safe.

As a Democrat, I am saddened and somewhat shocked that my party has missed this golden opportunity. On the issue of national security, I thought we had a clear choice.

We could have chosen to show some bipartisanship and some statesmanship and come together with the president early on. What a difference that could have made, for the Senate, for our party, and most importantly, for our nation's safety.

But instead, my party chose to make a huge, drawn-out, public display of disagreeing with the president on national security.

Of all the many things for my party to have a knock down drag out fight over, the issue of national security is absolutely the worst.

Had we chosen to support our Commander in Chief in this national crisis, we could have already passed this homeland security bill and turned our attention to the domestic issues that so badly need our attention.

Domestic issues like the economy and prescription drugs, for example. It is a shame that we've come so close on a prescription drug bill but haven't gotten it passed.

Wise heads around here know that if we don't reach an agreement on prescription drugs this time around, it's going to be years before we get this close again. And by then, prices will have escalated even more.

But instead, here we are in the third week of debate on homeland security.

Instead, we have wasted days that we could ill afford to waste. Days that have given our enemies more time to plot their next attack. We should have been going at this like a man killing snakes. Fixating on workplace procedures and rules and guidelines says a great deal about our priorities. And it's not good because human lives are at stake.

We should have been going at this like a man killing snakes. Choosing to fixate on workplace procedures and rules and guidelines says a great deal about our priorities. And it's not good because human lives are at stake.

We must pass a bill that the president will sign, not one that he will veto. That would just waste more time.

And we must pass a bill that gives the president the flexibility he needs to respond to terrorism on a moment's notice. A bill that gives him the ability to shift resources, including personnel, at the blink of an eye.

The purpose of homeland security should be to protect lives, not jobs. We must have a streamlined personnel system that can react quickly to meet the challenge of these dangerous times.

Not one that takes five months to hire a new employee and more than a year to fire a bad one.

Not one where a federal worker can come to work knee-walking drunk and he can't be fired for 30 days, and then he has the right to endless appeals. I ask you: Is that any way to fight a war?

When it comes to fighting a war and protecting America, I'm a great believer in Col. David Hackworth's thoughts and opinion. Listen to what that old warrior wrote a few days ago:

"One year after 9-11, our outfits fighting terrorism remain huge bureaucracies that are fat in the middle, slow on their feet, take forever to make a decision, and seem more interested in their own survival than the country's."

Union politics may be important, but they should never, never come before national security.

So, if I may offer some political advice to my Democratic colleagues. Let's accept this substitute. We are not doing our party any good by feeding the perception that Democrats are undermining the president of the United States on the war on terrorism. And to Joe Sixpack out there in that Wal-Mart parking lot, I'm afraid that's exactly what we appear to be doing.

I can think of no more unattractive picture our party could have projected six weeks out from an election than what's taken place on the floor of the Senate the past two weeks.

It's just been one long negative ad for the other side – free of charge. And if we don't accept this substitute, and somehow, some way, the Democratic leadership is successful in defeating or even weakening the president's national security legislation, we will be slitting our own throats.

And no one should think that they can just come back and cover their rears on this by voting for war on Iraq.

Seldom has there been – on any issue – a greater need for a united, bipartisan coalition to make what the president has called a “relentless march” to bring security to our nation and justice to our enemies.

That's why I'm part of this substitute and why I'm here and why I appeal to my Democratic colleagues to support it.

-30-