

Speech: H.R. 4401 - Amplifying Local Efforts to Root out Terrorism Act of 2016" (ALERT Act)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just three short years ago, a group of domestic terrorists were plotting attacks in my hometown in northwest Georgia. Federal Law Enforcement was informed that these terrorists were trying to obtain pipe bombs and other improvised explosive devices. Once detonated, these weapons could have destroyed property, disabled critical utilities, and potentially taken innocent human life.

Because of the imminent threat, a Federal Drug Task Force had to move quickly to intercept the suspects before they could carry out their attack. With such a short time to react to such a volatile situation, logic would suggest that Federal Law Enforcement would notify and enlist the assistance of the local sheriff's office. Considering the raid was to take place in the parking lot of a busy shopping center adjacent to a hospital, having local law enforcement assistance was clearly justified. However, there was one problem; the sheriff didn't have the proper security clearance, so he was not authorized to be briefed on the details of the case.

To stop these would-be terrorists; the FBI had to move quickly, and could not wait for a waiver to brief the sheriff, or get approval to enlist his assistance. This bureaucratic hurdle put the FBI, our local law enforcement, and the community at greater risk.

Unfortunately, this scenario plays out way too often across the nation. While our FBI and Homeland Security agents are doing an exemplary job of countering terrorist activities, their resources are being stretched very thin. With the threat of terrorism on the rise, we must find a way to provide these agents with additional resources.

This is why I have introduced H.R. 4401, The ALERT Act. The 'Amplifying Local Efforts to Root out Terrorism Act,' removes bureaucratic barriers and paves the way for the federal government to enhance state and local law enforcement involvement in fighting the war on terrorism. By providing the tools and training needed to combat terrorism on multiple levels, this Act will provide for more efficient cooperation and coordination with state and local officials.

Local law enforcement is crucial to our security, and they are too often overlooked as a valuable asset in fighting against terrorism. Through this legislation, the Department of Homeland Security will be authorized to train state and local law enforcement in the best methods used in combating evolving terror threats.

Proper security clearances are vital for our local law enforcement officials; so they may assist with countering terror activity, as well as receiving notification of pending threats in their local jurisdictions.

This bill requires the Department to keep Congress apprised of the number of security clearances issued to state and local law enforcement, so we can assess whether further congressional action is needed.

Because fighting terrorism is not a singular effort of the federal government, the ALERT Act provides increased community awareness of ongoing threats.

Radicalization is also a clear and present danger to Americans. The number of cases of homegrown terrorism is growing nationwide. Since September 11, 2001, there have been 139 homegrown jihadist plots. Community involvement in countering violent extremism has proven to be effective, as more than 75 percent of U.S. foreign-fighter arrests have involved tips from local sources, such as community members, relatives or friends. This bill will provide even more resources to root-out terrorists before they can act.

As we are moving into a new era of terrorism – that directly threatens our own communities; we must re-evaluate how we meet the current threat. Today, everyone has a part to play in protecting against terrorism – the neighbor next door, and the local police officer. While this legislation will not, in itself, end the threat of terrorism against our nation, it will allow for the better use of valuable resources already within our communities.

I urge all Members to join me in supporting this bill and I reserve the balance of my time.