Rep. Bilirakis Questions Homeland Security Panel on Homegrown Terrorism

WASHINGTON, DC (September 15, 2010) – Congressman Gus Bilirakis (FL-09) questioned panelists about the need to strengthen the student visa screening process and the role of the Internet in homegrown terrorism during a Homeland Security Committee hearing on Tuesday.

The hearing, titled “The Evolving Nature of Terrorism - Nine Years after the 9/11 Attacks,” comes days after a report from the 9/11 Commission found a rising threat of homegrown terrorism.

Bilirakis introduced legislation in May that would improve the background checks conducted on student visa applicants from high risk areas and enhance America’s ability to ensure, once in the country, foreign students are abiding by the terms of their visas.

"We must remain vigilant to ensure that terrorists do not use our student visa process as a back door into our country," said Bilirakis, the Ranking Member of the House Homeland Security Committee’s Management, Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee. “Over the past several years there have been instances which demonstrate shortcomings in our nation’s ability to properly screen and monitor foreign students.”

Bilirakis also questioned the role the Internet plays in inciting violence and terrorism.

“Terrorists organizations have become adept at using the Internet to recruit and inspire individuals who already live in our country to commit terrorist attacks, and we must take the necessary steps to combat this growing trend,” Bilirakis said.

Witnesses were members of the Bipartisan Policy Center’s National Security Preparedness Group, and included Peter Bergen, Senior Fellow, New America Foundation; Dr. Bruce Hoffman, Professor, Georgetown University; and Dr. Stephen Flynn, President, Center for National Policy.