

Washington, D.C. - This afternoon, US Rep. David Price (NC-04) delivered the following remarks on the House floor during debate of the Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

"Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to my colleagues, Mr. Rogers and Mr. Sabo, for their conscientious and cooperative efforts reflected in this bill.

"This bill would provide much needed additional funding to protect our borders. It would also boost DHS's efforts to track down potential terrorists and criminal aliens that are already in our country.

"It would shorten the backlog for people seeking to legally live in this country as permanent residents or citizens. And it would help protect our ports and chemical and nuclear facilities.

"Given the very limited funds Mr. Rogers and Mr. Sabo had to start with, theirs was not an easy or enviable task, and they have done an exceptional job with the poor hand they were dealt.

"BUT...I've said before, and I'll say it again: we can do better. We must do better. And we would do better, if we made better budget choices.

"The vote today does not exist in a vacuum. During recent funding debates, we have heard the Republican leaders say there "simply are no funds available" to provide what is needed. I suspect we'll hear them say it again today.

"What you WON'T hear them say is that since 9/11, we have spent 20 times as much on tax cuts, mainly benefiting the wealthiest Americans, as we have on protecting the American people from terrorist attacks. And just the other week, we passed another tax cut that will only benefit people inheriting estates that are worth millions of dollars. And so we go over the cliff fiscally, and our Republican friends try to pin the blame on discretionary domestic spending, including spending for security. We pass budget resolutions that fall far short, so that by the time we try to write appropriations bills within their limits, we have nothing left to talk about. All we can do is

lamey speak of the things we just aren't able to do in this bill because we do not have the funds.

"Well, we chose not to have those funds. And, to name one conspicuous example, for the second year in a row, we will cut the FIRE grant program—one of the most successful federal programs we have.

"And despite the fact that a recent FEMA study showed that 2/3 of our fire departments operate with staffing levels that do not meet the minimum safe staffing levels required by OSHA and the National Fire Protection Association, we are again badly under funding the SAFER program, which assists understaffed departments hire additional personnel.

"We pass bills authorizing improvements and grants. But when it comes time to pay for these programs, we'd rather put the country's money toward tax breaks for the wealthy than for police officers who are protecting our communities. Trillion-dollar tax breaks get rammed through Congress, but in this bill, the leadership says we have 'no choice' but to cut state block grants by 14%.

"Today our choices are indeed limited, although I'm hopeful we can make some improvements at the margins, for example by passing Mr. Sabo's first responder amendment.

"At the end of the day, we should pass this bill, and I am hopeful colleagues on both sides of the aisle will support it. But we should understand why the bill, despite our subcommittee's best efforts, falls short. And we should resolve to fix our country's budget policy so that at long last our nation's people and their security can come first."

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