

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today voted for funding to hire 3,000 new Border Patrol agents, make it easier to deport illegal immigrants who have committed crimes, and restore critical grants that will strengthen Arizona's homeland security.

The House approved the Homeland Security Appropriations bill by a vote of 268-150.

"These new Border Patrol agents are critical to securing our border and stopping illegal immigration," said Mitchell. "I hope the President will join me in making border security a top priority by signing this legislation."

The bill appropriates a total funding level of \$10.2 billion for Customs and Border Protection – an 8 percent increase from FY 2007 funding. The additional Border Patrol agents would bring the nationwide total to nearly 17,819. It also provides \$4.2 billion for Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a 6 percent increase from FY 2007.

The bill also requires that ICE obtain information on a monthly basis from correctional facilities throughout the country to identify incarcerated aliens who are subject to deportation. Under this bill, every deportable alien should be identified and deported immediately upon their release from prison. The bill provides \$2.1 billion for detention and removal activities, a 7 percent, or \$134 million, increase from FY 2007.

"Deporting those illegal immigrants who have committed violent crimes is absolutely imperative to keeping our communities safe," Mitchell said.

The bill also makes State Homeland Security Grants, which are used to meet the needs of first responders, including hiring, training and equipping first responders, a priority. The bill provides \$550 million for FY 2008, a \$25 million increase from FY 2007. The President had proposed cutting the grants by 52 percent. At a meeting last month, Arizona Homeland Security Director Leesa Morrison told Mitchell that cuts to State Homeland Security Grants were having a detrimental impact on state agencies, and asked Mitchell to restore cuts to the grant program.

The Homeland Security Appropriations bill also increases funding to protect critical port facilities and infrastructure and provides funding for new explosive detection systems at airports and doubles the amount of cargo screened on passenger aircraft.

The legislation also includes strong oversight provisions to ensure the careful spending of taxpayers' dollars and eliminates wasteful no-bid contracts.