

“Terrorists are enemy combatants, not common criminals”

House to Vote As Early as Today

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Vern Buchanan’s (FL-13) legislation requiring foreign terrorists to be prosecuted in a military tribunal instead of civilian court was accepted Tuesday by the Rules Committee and now heads to the House floor for a vote.

Buchanan’s proposal, introduced earlier this year as the “Military Tribunals for Terrorists Act,” will be offered as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1540). The vote could come as early as this afternoon.

“Terrorists with ties to known terror organizations such as al Qaeda should not be afforded the same constitutional protections as American citizens,” said Buchanan, Florida’s only member of the powerful Ways & Means Committee. “Using military tribunals to interrogate, prosecute, and sentence foreign terrorists who conspire or attack the United States is a far better way to handle these kinds of sensitive matters.”

Buchanan noted that last year, a civilian court jury in New York City found an al-Qaeda terrorist innocent on 279 of 280 felony terrorism charges even though his bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa killed 224 people and wounded thousands more. Prosecutors were restricted from bringing full evidence to bear in the trial, a limitation that would not extend to a military tribunal.

Last month, Buchanan commended the decision by Attorney General Eric Holder to prosecute the 9-11 mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, in a military tribunal. Until then, Holder had said the Department of Justice would try Mohammad and four others in civilian courts.

Buchanan’s “Military Tribunals for Terrorists Act” is co-sponsored by three leading national security experts in Congress: the Chairman of the Permanent Select Committee on

Intelligence, Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI); the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-CA); the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX).

"Foreign terrorists who kill innocent men, women, and children are enemy combatants, not common criminals," said Buchanan. "We need to pass this bill to make sure they are treated as such."

The House Rules Committee decides which amendments are allowed to be considered during debate.