

Popular culture clashes with homeland security mission, panel chief says

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The chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee asserted Friday that popular culture is undermining homeland security efforts by creating the impression that threats are not real.

"The nation can hardly succeed in this inevitably long and arduous struggle if our popular culture -- our media, our entertainers and even many politicians at home and abroad - - continues to spread the perception that the need for homeland security is a contrivance, a snare and a delusion," Rep. Christopher Cox, R-Calif., said during a keynote speech at the McGraw-Hill Companies Homeland Security Summit in Washington.

Cox singled out a new film by director Michael Moore, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, saying it presents a "warped view" that terrorists would be justified in further attacks because the United States is responding aggressively on all fronts to terrorism. The film received the longest standing ovation in the history of the Cannes International Film Festival last month, according to *Entertainment Weekly*.

"Two weeks ago, the international film festival at Cannes awarded its foremost prize and one of the most prestigious honors in international cinema to a purported documentary film, the central purpose of which is that the president of the United States has invented the need for homeland security," Cox said. "Most dangerously, it claims that the president is using fear-mongering of future terrorism in a cynical, political manipulation of the nation and the world. The film ominously intones that you can make people do anything if they're afraid."

Cox said he has watched trailers for the film on the Internet and plans to see the entire movie, which will be released nationally June 25 by Lions Gate Entertainment and IFC Films. Lions Gate and Michael Moore did not respond to requests for comment.

Cox said the Homeland Security Department and other federal agencies should not assume that the public will have a favorable impression of their efforts. He said he expects the theme of Moore's film to be echoed in "all conceivable forms of popular culture that the nation of a quarter-billion people can consume."

"To many, not only in our own country but around the world, the so-called imperative of homeland security is a fiction," he said. "It's a mere invention of the military industry complex designed to maintain a constant atmosphere of crisis. To such people, this new notion of homeland security is only a threat to our civil liberties as dangerous as it is unnecessary. It is mere pretext for President Bush to aid in his reelection."

Cox also said the country should prepare "to spend what will probably be an indefinitely increasing amount in every year for the foreseeable future" to develop technology to fight the war

on terrorism.

He reaffirmed the homeland security efforts being undertaken by the government and private sector.

"The elaborate national and international effort that our country has successfully led every single hour of every single day since Sept. 11 is necessary because we have been attacked, and we will continue to be attacked by determined enemies whose aim is both the mass murder of American civilians and the destruction of America's economy, our government and our way of life," Cox said.