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CONTACT: MARA LEE

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(202) 225-7163

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PASSES MATSUI CRUISE SAFETY BILL

Stand-Alone Legislation Will Protect Americans Aboard Cruise Ships

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (D-CA) joined with her colleagues in the House of Representatives to pass H.R. 3360, the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act of 2009 by a bipartisan vote of 416-4. Introduced by Representative Matsui earlier this year, the legislation is a critical and common-sense fix which will provide safety and security to Americans who go on cruise vacations without realizing they are not protected under U.S. laws when they leave its territorial waters.

“Unfortunately, the status quo has allowed cruise ships to operate under foreign flags of convenience - but leaving our territorial waters does not mean that cruise ships should be allowed to operate without basic laws that protect American citizens,” Matsui said today on the House floor during consideration of her legislation. “Over the past several years, I have met with far too many victims and their families who have experienced tragedy on the high seas, only to be left to fend for themselves. It has become increasingly apparent that this landmark legislation is both urgent and necessary.”

Rep. Matsui was contacted regarding the need for increased protections for Americans on cruise ships in 2006, when her constituent, Laurie Dishman, wrote to her for help. Ms. Dishman was the victim of a sexual assault while on a cruise vacation, and was given no assistance by the cruise line in properly securing evidence of the assault, identifying her attacker, or prosecuting the crime once back on shore. Devastated, she reached out to Congresswoman Matsui for help. Matsui immediately began working on this legislation and held multiple hearings with the support of Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Jim Oberstar (D-MN) and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Elijah Cummings (D-MD), to bring the reality of what was happening on these ships to light.

“Unfortunately, incidences of sexual attacks, missing persons and other serious crimes have continued to be reported on board cruise ships in recent years, despite increased media and Congressional attention on this issue,” stated Matsui. “The passage of my Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act will not only help recent victims of cruise crimes and offer them enhanced protection, but will help from preventing further crimes from happening. We cannot sit back and witness these violent and reprehensible acts to continue.”

Matsui’s legislation will require the cruise industry to comply with a number of security provisions including specific rail heights, peep holes, warning devices, and cabin security measures. Additionally, the bill necessitates that vessels are equipped with a video surveillance system to assist in documenting and prosecuting crimes, and requires vessels to maintain a log

book to record reports on specified complaints. Finally, the law will mandate cruise vessel personnel to contact both the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the United States Coast Guard as soon as a crime involving homicide, suspicious deaths, missing U.S. nationals, kidnapping, assault, and other serious occurrences are reported.

Passage of this legislation is in addition to the inclusion of the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act of 2009 in the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2010 recently passed by the House of Representatives. Congresswoman Matsui and her colleagues are hopeful that the Senate will soon take up consideration of companion legislation introduced by Senator John Kerry (D-MA) that was passed unanimously by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee this summer, and be sent to the President as soon as possible.

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