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God in middle of security debate

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) | A Kentucky lawmaker says the state's Homeland Security office should credit God with keeping Kentucky safe.

State Rep. Tom Riner, a Southern Baptist minister who was instrumental in establishing that requirement in 2006, disapproves of the fact that Homeland Security doesn't currently mention God in its mission statement or on its Web site.

The law passed under former Gov. Ernie Fletcher, who prominently credited God in annual reports to state leaders. But Gov. Steve Beshear's administration didn't credit God in its 2008 Homeland Security report issued last month.

"We certainly expect it to be there, of course," Mr. Riner, Louisville Democrat, told the Lexington Herald-Leader.

The law that organized the Homeland Security office first lists Homeland Security's duty to recognize that government itself can't secure the state without God, even before mentioning other duties, which include distributing millions of dollars in federal grants and analyzing possible threats.

The religious language was in a floor amendment introduced by Mr. Riner and passed overwhelmingly by the General Assembly. It lists the office's initial duty as "stressing the dependence on Almighty God as being vital to the security of the commonwealth."

Included in the law is a requirement that the office must post a plaque at the entrance to the state Emergency Operations Center with an 88-word statement that begins, "The safety and security of the commonwealth cannot be achieved apart from reliance upon Almighty God."

Thomas Preston, Mr. Beshear's Homeland Security chief, said he is not interested in stepping into a religious debate.

"I will not try to supplant Almighty God," Mr. Preston said. "All I do is try to obey the dictates of the Kentucky General Assembly. I really don't know what their motivation was for this. They obviously felt strongly about it."

Mr. Riner said crediting God with helping ensure the state's safety is appropriate.

"This is recognition that government alone cannot guarantee the perfect safety of the people of Kentucky," he said. "Government itself, apart from God, cannot

close the security gap. The job is too big for government."

But state Sen. Kathy Stein, Lexington Democrat, said requiring the department to credit God takes away from Homeland Security's mission.

"It's very sad to me that we do this sort of thing," she said. "It takes away from the seriousness of the public discussion over security, and it clearly hurts the credibility of this office if it's supposed to be depending on God, first and foremost."