

Homeland Security Budget Hearing
HSGAC
Senator Joe Lieberman
March 9, 2005

Thank you, Madame Chairman. Not long ago, CIA Director Porter Goss told the Senate Intelligence Committee that, “it may only be a matter of time” before terrorists try to attack us with weapons of mass destruction. At the same hearing, FBI Director Robert Mueller warned of possible terrorist operations now underway within our borders and said finding such terrorists is “one of the most difficult challenges” his organization faces.

Protecting Americans from terrorists cannot be done on the cheap. Yet, in its Fiscal Year 2006 budget proposal for the Department of Homeland Security, the Administration once again underestimates what it will take to keep our citizens as safe as possible here at home.

The increases are modest; only a three to four percent increase in DHS discretionary spending after inflation, and even that increase largely depends upon a controversial airline ticket fee that may or may not be approved by Congress. More important, the increases pale by comparison to what the experts tell us is necessary. And some key homeland security funding that was authorized by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act – signed into law by the President last November – has simply been ignored.

And that, I'm afraid, leaves us with far too many gaps in our defenses, gaps ranging from the inability of first responders to communicate between agencies and jurisdictions, to a lack of preparedness for a biological attack, to inadequately defended train, railway, and highway transportation networks.

So, what needs to be done? I have proposed to the Senate Budget Committee an \$8.4 billion increase in the budget for homeland security government-wide. Of that amount, \$6.3 billion would be for programs within the Department of Homeland Security – over and above the President's proposed \$2.5 billion increase.

About half of my proposed increase in the DHS budget would go for training, equipment, and salaries for first responders. And a significant proportion of that would be invested in interoperable communications equipment to allow first responders from different agencies and different jurisdictions to speak to one another during a crisis. I just cannot understand why the Administration is seeking to cut first responder programs – by \$565 million in DHS, and a jarring \$1.7 billion government wide.

It is tempting to think we need no new investments in these areas because we have increased spending on homeland security since September 11, 2001, and because we face difficult budget constraints. But when we focus on the threat confronting us, it is clear these investments are urgent.

Homeland security expert Stephen Flynn, a former Coast Guard Commandant, describes our predicament in his recent book, *America the Vulnerable*. He says, open quote:

“Homeland security has entered our post-9/11 lexicon, but homeland insecurity remains the abiding reality. With the exception of airports, much of what is critical to our way of life remains unprotected . . . From water and food supplies, refineries, energy grids and pipelines; bridges, tunnels, trains, trucks and cargo containers; to the cyber backbone that underpins the information age in which we live, the measures we have been cobbling together are hardly fit to deter amateur thieves, vandals and hackers, never mind determined terrorists. Worse still, small improvements are often oversold as giant steps forward, lowering the guard of average citizens as they carry on their daily routine with an unwarranted sense of confidence.”

End of quote. Flynn further points out that homeland security spending is still very small compared to the overall Pentagon budget, suggesting that the federal government continues to believe that our primary threat will be found outside our borders. But we know that is not true.

We must listen to the security experts who tell us that this terrorist threat is one we must live with – and defend against – for the indefinite future. And we must listen to the experts who say we should match the threat with the resources necessary to vanquish it.

Mr. Secretary, I know you are hard at work, examining many of these shortfalls. I look forward to hearing from you about how we will close our country's "insecurity gap." Thank you.

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