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SENATORS COLLINS, LIEBERMAN CALL ON OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TO RESTORE FUNDS TO COAST GUARD BUDGET

WASHINGTON — Senator Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, joined with Senator Susan Collins, R-Me., Ranking Member, in urging the Obama Administration to restore funds slated to be cut from the U.S. Coast Guard by eliminating an unnecessary set-aside for terrorist trials in the United States.

Currently, the President's Fiscal Year 2011 budget proposes to cut the Coast Guard's funding by $75 million below last year's budget and to reduce the number of its uniformed personnel by more than 1,100. Rather than do that, Senator Collins recommends that the Administration reallocate to the Coast Guard $200 million that the President included as a line-item to cover heightened security needs for terrorist trials held in large metropolitan areas.

"After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Coast Guard took on an expanded homeland security mission," Senator Collins said. "While the Coast Guard remains responsible for its traditional missions, including life-saving search and rescue operations along our coastlines, it is now also responsible for protecting our ports from a wide variety of threats, including the potential smuggling of weapons of mass destruction.

"An attack on a major port would have devastating consequences, causing widespread loss of life. Because the ports are vital economic centers, an attack would also send ripple effects throughout our economy. As we look forward, it is clear that the Coast Guard's role in vital missions will only expand. The exemplary performance of Coast Guard men and women in response to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti stands as the most recent reminders of how much we rely on the bravery, skill and dedication of the Coast Guard."

Said Senator Lieberman: "The Coast Guard is absolutely central to the nation's maritime and homeland security and its high level of performance has been on display numerous times in the last several years. Furthermore, the Coast Guard Commandant has said the service needs to expand to keep up with its increasing homeland security duties. That's why I am concerned the Administration's FY2011 budget proposes to cut more than 1,100 military and civilian Coast Guard personnel.

"Since I think terrorist trials should be conducted in a military, rather than a civilian, setting, the proposed $200 million set aside for security at civilian terror trials would be far better spent shoring up the critical operations of the U.S. Coast Guard."

Their proposal comes ahead of the Senate Homeland Security Committee's scheduled hearing Wednesday on the submission of the Department of Homeland Security's 2011 annual budget.

For the federal budget beginning in fiscal year 2011, the President's budget request would increase the Department of Homeland Security's by 2.6 percent. The budget would also go up in each of the next four years. Nonetheless, nearly 20 percent of this increase was set aside for security needs related to trials of terrorists, like 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, in places like New York City.