

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2011

# SENATORS REVIEW DHS FY2012 BUDGET

WASHINGTON – The Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee heard testimony Thursday from Secretary Janet Napolitano about the Department of Homeland Security's Fiscal Year 2012 budget.

The hearing was framed by the tragic murder the day before of Jaime Zapata, an agent of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, after an ambush in Mexico. A second agent was shot and wounded.

“This savage attack reminds us of the risks assumed on our behalf by the men and women who work at the Department of Homeland Security,” Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., said. “We honor their service and thank them for their commitment. The attack also reminds us of the variety of threats our nation faces, and the Department of Homeland Security's equally varied mission to secure the nation from them.

“Balancing these risks with the out-of-control deficits our government is struggling with today, the budget request is fair and restrained. It does not include everything I would have wanted, but I appreciate that you have had to make some very tough decisions in putting this budget together.”

Ranking Member Susan Collins, R-Me., said: “Protecting our nation and our citizens is not just a line item; it is a top priority. Overall, the President proposes to continue a trend of moderate increases in the Department's budget. Unfortunately, this slight increase hides unwise cuts to some proven programs.

“I am disappointed that the Administration again has proposed to limit Operation Stonegarden to the southwest border. Operation Stonegarden should be used to help secure both our northern and southern borders by funding joint operations between the Border Patrol and state and local law enforcement.”

The President's FY 2012 budget request for the Department asks for \$43.2 billion in net discretionary funding – an increase of 1.5 percent from the current level of funding and a decrease of 0.8 percent from the Department's request for FY 2011.

The budget request focuses additional resources on terrorist travel and cyber security. It requires additional spending on key programs at Customs and Border Protection and the Transportation Security Administration.

Lieberman expressed concern that FEMA takes a large hit to its operating budget, potentially jeopardizing the steady progress FEMA has made since Hurricane Katrina to transform FEMA and improve our national preparedness for disasters. He also expressed concern by a 36 percent cut in the assistance the federal government gives fire departments for equipment and training and by the elimination of the Metropolitan Medical Response System, a small but effective program that helps communities prepare for catastrophes that result in mass casualties.

Collins also questioned Secretary Napolitano about a report that revealed that FEMA stopped attempting to recover all improper payments resulting from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and subsequent disasters. FEMA identified approximately 160,000 applicants dating back to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that received improper disaster assistance payments through the Individuals and Households Program, totaling approximately \$643 million. Collins pressed the Secretary to execute internal controls that will better guard against making improper disaster assistance payments in the future