

FRIDAY, JULY 27, 2007

# **SENATE PASSES \$100 MILLION FOR LIEBERMAN/COLLINS INTEROPERABILITY GRANT PROGRAM**

WASHINGTON –Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., and Ranking Member Susan Collins, R-Me., have successfully won Senate acceptance of a proposal to fund for the first time a \$100 million grants program to improve interoperable radio communications for first responders.

The Lieberman-Collins amendment to the 2008 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Bill provides \$100 million in Fiscal Year 2008 for the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program that will be awarded based on an all-hazards approach, with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of state, local, and tribal governments during a catastrophic disaster or terrorist attack. The amendment passed the Senate late Thursday by voice vote. It must still be agreed to by a Senate-House conference report.

The grant program is created by another Lieberman-Collins bill, the Improving America's Security Act of 2007, which implements the unfinished recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. That measure cleared the Senate late Thursday as well. The grants can only be used for initiatives that are consistent with Statewide Interoperability Plans and the National Emergency Communications Plan.

“September 11th taught us many lessons about what we need to do to protect the homeland, including improving the interoperable communications capabilities of our first responders,” Lieberman said in a statement on the Senate floor. “Then Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, and the existing problems of interoperability were compounded by a devastating operability crisis. This legislation would provide additional, and much needed, resources to help the nation’s first responders achieve what I believe to be our shared goal of comprehensive interoperable communications at the federal, state and local levels. We’ve made progress by including this grant program in the 9/11

recommendations bill. Now, if the House agrees, this \$100-million pledge is a good start on the path to funding this program adequately, which is so critical to our nation's ability to respond to disasters of all kinds."

Collins said: "Emergency communications is a critical issue. Hurricane Katrina and the events of September 11th have shown us that our first responders and emergency services personnel often lack the equipment that allows for communication between multiple fire, police, and rescue departments, along with local, state, and federal agencies. This legislation will help quicken and improve the response of America's emergency personnel. I am pleased to see this program, and its funding, pass the Senate."

The interoperability grants would be provided to states only after the Office of Emergency Communications within DHS approved Statewide Interoperability Plans. There are additional safeguards within the 9/11 legislation to prevent waste, fraud and abuse.

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