TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2006

HOMELAND SECURITY: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Senator Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., Ranking Member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, delivered the following statement at a hearing Tuesday on "Homeland Security: The Next Five Years."

Thank you, Madam Chairman and welcome to you, Secretary Chertoff. Madam Chairman, I'm grateful to you for calling this hearing to discuss the state of our homeland security five years after Islamic terrorists murdered 3,000 innocent Americans and shocked the rest of us from our false post Cold War sense of security. Yesterday was a day of remembrance and requiem. Today, we will ask where we want to be in homeland security five years from now. What can we say on a personalized level to the parents of America about what we will do in the next five years together to be able to guarantee that their children's upbringing and lives will be as secure as theirs were prior to 9/11?

September 11, 2001, was like Pearl Harbor, a tragedy of such enormity that it ushered in an understanding that we are in a war with a different kind of enemy, and that our country, led by the federal government, must pull together and do better to fulfill our Constitutional duty to provide for the common defense against this unconventional and unprecedented threat. The threat of a terrorist attack on Americans is as real today as it was five years ago. The foiled plot to explode airliners heading to the United States from the UK is the most recent and public example.

Together, we can say to the American people that they are safer than they were on 9/11/01, although, as we all acknowledge, they are not yet as safe as we want them to be. We have every reason, as we look back over these five years, to thank G-d and to thank all the work being done each day by 180,000 Department of Homeland Security employees to protect our homeland security and that America and Americans have not been attacked at home since 9/11/01. We are thankful that a number of terrorist plots have been disrupted through increased vigilance at home and cooperative work with our allies abroad.

Since 9/11, we have made historic organizational changes in our government to shore up our homeland defenses. These include the reorganization of our vast and far-flung security and emergency response agencies into the Department of Homeland Security, the creation of the 9/11 Commission, the enactment of its bold proposals for reform for greater security, and the establishment of the Northern Command to focus the Department of Defense on homeland, as well as international, security. The point of these changes has been to focus federal attention on terrorism 24 hours a day, seven days a week with resolve, coordination, and strong leadership, to bring purpose and effectiveness to the protection of our homeland. As I have said, we are clearly safer today for all we have done together, and there are clearly weak links remaining, that we must deal with together.

I know that along the way there have been misgivings and soul-searching about the Department of Homeland Security, but I do not hear any credible voice saying that we erred in creating the Department of Homeland Security. So if the Department has not yet fully lived up to all that we in Congress hoped it would be, let us resolve today to look forward to the next five years, to work together to make it so.

Let me say very briefly that the first great challenge the Department is facing is to pull itself together. We gave the department an enormous task to bring together 180,000 federal employees from a large number of agencies with different cultures and on different directions. We need what Warren Bennis, advisor to four presidents, called the “capacity to translate vision into reality,” that is leadership. It’s a great challenge, but I believe progress has been made in the time the Department has existed.

The failure of leadership we saw acutely in the run-up and response to Hurricane Katrina, Mr. Secretary, as you know, the pain and devastation that Katrina caused and is still causing would be even worse were a nuclear weapon to explode in a crowded city, or if terrorists were to spray a mall with a deadly biological agent, or even if a naturally-occurring virus spread to the level of a pandemic.

We are looking to you for leadership on these threats. I hope that you have acted to apply some of the painful lessons learned in Katrina. You know that we on this Committee have done the same through legislative work and we know there is more work to do.

Second, I continue to believe that we are continuing to under fund some critical Homeland Security needs, particularly our first responders. Mr. Secretary, today I look forward to hearing from you your sense, your vision, of where this

Department of going and also what you are going to do to translate that vision into reality and to action.

The security of the American people is the highest priority of our government. The plain fact is, without security, there can not be and will not be the life, liberty, and pursuit of property that our government was formed to secure. So we have to get this right, and we have to get it right together.

I close with thanks to Senator Collins and the other members of this Committee, as we look back over the last five years since 9/11/01, in a Capitol City which has become all too partisan, reflexively. On the question of homeland security, on balance, this Committee has acted with a real sense of unity that goes well beyond partisanship for the national interest. Legislation that we have reported out has been adopted by Congress, signed by the President, and, undoubtedly today, makes America safer. Madam Chairman, I thank you for your leadership and point to the commitment of all members of this Committee to work together to secure our future against a brutal and inhumane enemy.