

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2006

LIEBERMAN ASSAILS ADMINISTRATION BUDGET FOR FAILING FIRST RESPONDERS

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., issued the following statement Monday in response to the Administration's Fiscal Year 2007 homeland security budget:

"Once again, the Bush Administration's reality does not match the President's rhetoric when it comes to homeland security. His homeland security budget reflects a waning interest in funding the war on terrorism at home, at the same time that Hurricane Katrina has shown we are not as prepared as we must be to respond to a national catastrophe. Although the Administration says it has increased homeland security spending by 6 percent, that figure is contingent on an increase in passenger airline security fees, which Congress rejected last year. In fact, without the fee increase, DHS' budget increases by at most 2.3 percent, less than the rate of inflation. For the third year in a row, the President's budget slashes first responder funding to irresponsibly low levels. The men and women on the front lines of the domestic war against terror need better training, and equipment. Instead of responding to those needs, this budget continues a disturbing trend in cutting first responder grants by 24 percent from FY06 and 50 percent overall when compared to FY04. The President eliminates dedicated funding for the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program, which provides grants to states and law enforcement organization to assist in the prevention of terrorist attacks. The budget also shamefully cuts grants to firefighters, reducing Fire Assistance Grants, which provide funding for training and equipment by 46 percent, and altogether eliminating the SAFER program, which assists in hiring

additional firefighters. The total decrease in assistance for firefighters is over 55 percent. Furthermore, grants to states, which traditionally have provided the largest source of funding for equipment and training – including critical interoperable communications equipment – are reduced by one-third compared to FY06 and a whopping 71 percent from FY04. The President's budget also slashes minimum guaranteed homeland security funding to states by 78 percent – to \$1.58 million, down from \$7.13 million in FY06 – which threatens to leave many states without enough to protect their citizens. We know that the public health infrastructure is not prepared for a biological attack, or even a natural outbreak of pandemic flu. Yet, the Administration is calling for the complete elimination of the Metropolitan Medical Response System which provides funding to over 100 metropolitan areas to assist them in planning for and coordinating medical emergencies. And for the third year in a row, the Administration has provided no additional funding for FEMA's National Medical Disaster System and its medical assistance teams. Finally, the Administration has again cut funding for the hospital preparedness program at HHS and provided no increase in funding for the grant program that helps state and local health departments prepare for health emergencies. We know that our mass transit system remains vulnerable to the kind of attacks we saw last year in London. But, the Administration ignores Congress' FY06 appropriation of \$150 million for rail and transit security grants and continues to provide no money dedicated specifically to rail and transit security. Instead, the Administration once again proposes to cover rail and transit security in an amorphous \$585 million fund for targeted infrastructure protection, leaving the security of our daily commutes to a bureaucratic fight within DHS over which infrastructure asset should merit the most attention. Too many high risk chemical facilities are not secure. But the President's budget dedicates only \$10 million specifically to oversee the security of chemical facilities, a woefully insufficient amount of money for this dangerous problem. Senator Collins and I have proposed bipartisan chemical security legislation to address the need for greater security for high risk plants by authorizing DHS to require that those facilities assess and address their security risks. This Administration's budget also jeopardizes the Coast Guard's ability to do its job. It contains a modest increase, to pay for a move to a new headquarters and for protecting the airspace around Washington, D.C., but too little to modernize the aging fleet of the Coast Guard, which performed heroically in response to Hurricane Katrina. In sum, the President's budget shortchanges essential homeland defense programs. I intend to work with members of both parties in Congress to do better for our security.

