

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2005

LIEBERMAN OPPOSES HOMELAND SECURITY SPENDING BILL

WASHINGTON – Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., released the following statement Friday in opposition to the Fiscal Year 2006 Homeland Security Department Appropriations bill, approved by the Senate on a voice vote. “It is with regret that I oppose this conference report.

“I am a strong advocate of the need for the Department of Homeland Security and its work. And as the ranking member of the Department’s lead authorizing committee, I do not lightly oppose this appropriations bill for the Department’s vital work. But I feel I have no choice but to protest what I consider to be dangerous and misguided cuts in the vital programs that help America’s first responders. “Just weeks ago, we watched with horror as our fellow citizens in Louisiana and Mississippi suffered the ravages of Hurricane Katrina. It was inevitable that a hurricane of that size and intensity would cause hardship. But we know that the pain was far greater – and the recovery far more daunting – than it needed to have been if our government had done all it could to prepare for and respond to the catastrophe. We know that preparedness planning was inadequate; that first responders lacked the equipment and communications they needed to respond; and that first responders and officials did not have the training and command structures they needed to work effectively together to help the many victims depending on them. And this for a catastrophic hurricane that had been predicted in advance. We can only speculate what preparedness and response to an unforeseen catastrophic terror attack might look like. “We know, in short, that we have very far to go before we are as ready as we must be for the threats ahead. So why are we now asked to approve dramatic cuts in

the very programs that could help strengthen these essential capabilities? “This conference report would cut the three core first responder programs – the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP), the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP) – by 28 percent – nearly a third. The state homeland grants, which make up the backbone of most prevention and preparedness efforts, would be cut in half from FY 05 levels. And this comes on top of several years of cuts to these accounts. I know these cuts will leave unacceptable gaps in homeland security efforts in my own state of Connecticut, and I assume other states will also be unable to achieve their preparedness and response goals without more help from the federal government. “By contrast, the Senate voted in support of S. 21, a bill sponsored by Senator Collins and me, to authorize a significant increase in funding for these core first responder programs. The Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee has also endorsed legislation to create a new dedicated grant program to help first responders obtain interoperable communications equipment. This vital need – so painfully apparent on 9/11 and again during Katrina and its aftermath – alone is estimated to cost billions of dollars. Currently, first responders must purchase interoperable communications systems with these general homeland security grants, making the pending cuts all the more distressing. “I recognize that appropriators struggled with constraints imposed by the Administration’s budget and had to make difficult choices between many important homeland security needs. I appreciate that conferees fought to include dedicated money for rail, transit and port security grants, as well as for the Coast Guard’s Deepwater program. But I reject the premise that we must accept this as the best we can do for our first responders. It is not the best we can do. It must not be the best we can do. We know that the threats – natural or manmade – are real, and that we are not yet ready to meet them. Katrina has just underscored that lesson. Two years ago, a distinguished task force chaired by our former colleague Warren Rudman told us that our first responders were “drastically underfunded, dangerously unprepared” and that we would need close to \$100 billion over five years to meet critical preparedness and response needs. Yet in the time since, we have only whittled away at these critical programs rather than strengthening them. As I have said before, we have the best military in the world because we are willing to pay for it. We should not do less for our defenses here at home. “I wish to go on record opposing this conference report because I believe we must find a way to do more for our first responders and the communities they serve.”