

**Floor Statement of Senator Joe Lieberman on the Collins-Lieberman Amendment  
to S. Con Res. 18, the Congressional Budget Resolution**

**March 16, 2005**

Mr. President, I am honored to rise to speak on behalf of the amendment my distinguished colleague and friend Senator Collins of Maine has offered to this budget resolution. This amendment will make sure adequate funding is provided for key programs at the Department of Homeland Security.

I am very grateful to Senator Collins, who is the chair of the newly named Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. I am privileged to serve as the ranking Democrat on that committee. I am very glad to join with Senator Collins in offering this amendment because it continues the statement that when it comes to security, whether in the world through the Armed Services Committee or here at home through the Homeland Security Committee, we ought to act in a bipartisan, nonpartisan fashion.

This is genuinely a bipartisan amendment. This amendment and the increases it provides would be paid for by reducing administrative expenses and would not increase the deficit. It would provide an additional \$855 million that we believe is vitally needed to prepare our first responders, to secure our ports, and to strengthen our borders.

Our intelligence and security experts tell us the threat of terrorist attack here at home is one we are going to have to live with for some time to come. The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Porter Goss, recently said "it may only be a matter of time" before terrorists strike again within the United States with weapons of mass destruction. And new intelligence informs us that the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, now affiliated with Osama bin Laden, leading a group of terrorists in Iraq, may have conferred with bin Laden about attacks within the United States at nonobvious targets spread throughout this country of ours.

The fact is, we remain vulnerable. We are safer, as the 9/11 Commission said in its report last year, than we were on 9/11, but we are still not yet fully safe.

In a recent letter to the Senate Budget Committee, looking at what I took to be the needs of our country with regard to homeland security, I recommended an additional \$8.4 billion in homeland security spending governmentwide, with \$4.2 billion going to first responders.

In the current context, that is a large number, but I truly believe every dollar would have been well spent and would have improved and increased our sense of security from terrorism here at home.

The fact is, we have the best military in the world, in the history of the world, as we have seen in Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years. One of the reasons we do, in addition to the extraordinary commitment, skill, and bravery of our personnel, is we have been willing to invest money to provide that first-rate defense.

The same is true here at home. We will not become secure on the cheap. I understand that the \$8.4 billion I proposed in my letter to the Budget Committee is not going to find majority support here on the Senate floor. But surely we can agree not to go backwards. Although the administration has recommended increases, some of them targeted to homeland security programs, in its fiscal year 2006 budget, those increases are very modest and very few. And, unfortunately, the proposed budget would actually cut key Department of Homeland Security first responder programs by 32 percent.

It has been said before, but it cannot be said often enough, that our first responders are on the front lines of the war on terror here at home. In fact, they are more than our first responders. They can be hundreds of thousands of additional first preventers. We must give them what they need to do their jobs effectively for us. That means dollars to help train and equip State and local police, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians to be first responders, preventers, and to help detect or disrupt terrorist activity before an attack, and dollars to ensure that should an attack occur, these men and women who serve us will have the training and the equipment they need to respond, to save lives, to localize the damage.

State and localities across our country are using a lot of their own money and taking a lot of initiative on their own to prepare to defend against terrorist attack. But they cannot do it alone, nor should they have to. Therefore, the amendment Senator Collins and I are proposing this evening would provide \$565 million to restore the administration's proposed cuts to Homeland Security Department first responder programs, to get us back to where we have been.

That would include State homeland security grants, firefighter grants, and emergency management planning grants. Maintaining these programs at their current levels is the least we can do given the enormous demands on our first responders in our municipalities and States.

Mr. President, the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force, headed by our former colleague, Senator Warren Rudman, as an example of one standard of expenditures possibly necessary here, called for nearly \$100 billion over 5 years just to prepare first responders. A recent survey by the National Governors Association found that communications interoperability is the top homeland security priority for many States. That is as it says. How can we make sure that in a moment of crisis those first responders from different agencies and different jurisdictions can, in fact, communicate with one another? Only a few States have achieved that interoperability because it is so expensive.

Just last week, New York's Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response reported that emergency medical services personnel generally lack not only proper equipment but also proper training.

Without more support, our first responders simply will not be able to provide the help we need if terror strikes.

Second, in our amendment, Senator Collins and I also provide for \$150 million in dedicated funding for port security. The budget resolution provides none--no funds--in this area. It is hard to overstate the importance of our ports to our economy and transportation network. Ninety-five percent of all our trade flows through our ports, and a potential terrorist attack at one of them would cause economic havoc for our country. In fact, the U.S. Coast Guard has estimated it will cost more than \$7 billion to effectively secure America's ports.

Unfortunately, this budget does not guarantee any spending for port security. Rather, it combines a large array of homeland security needs--including port security--into a catch-all fund for infrastructure protection. This fund is too small to cover all infrastructure protection needs. Therefore, the amendment that Senator Collins and I introduce tonight would guarantee that port security gets at least the fiscal year 2005 level of \$150 million.

Finally, border security. The 9/11 Commission bill passed by Congress and signed by the President at the end of last year authorized 2,000 new Border Patrol agents for this year. The President's budget funds only 210 new agents. These new hires, as I see them, would basically replace agents who were moved from the southern border to beef up staffing at the northern border.

Our amendment would provide \$140 million for border security. That would allow the Department of Homeland Security to hire 1,000 new agents in the coming fiscal year, which I am confident--and Senator Collins is, too--would be enough to make a noticeable difference in our border defenses.

Mr. President, bottom line: This is a modest proposal. In large part, it is a status quo proposal, keeping us at least where we have been and not moving backward. The experts have told us that we need to invest billions more than we are. We are still learning of new vulnerabilities all the time. We cannot afford to retreat in our efforts, when we know there is still a great distance to go before our first responders are well prepared and other gaps at our borders and ports are closed.

That is the intention of this bipartisan amendment. I urge my colleagues to support it. I thank the Chair and I thank Senator Collins for her leadership once again in proposing this amendment. I am proud to stand with her on this, as I have on so many other matters.

