

**FY 05 Homeland Security Budget Amendment**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Senator Joe Lieberman**  
**March 11, 2004**

We have just passed the first anniversary of the Department of Homeland Security and, with it, a round of reflection on the status of our homeland defenses. The verdict is clear: Yes, we are stronger and safer at home thanks to the Department and other steps we have taken since 9/11. But no, we are not nearly as safe as we should be. We are not as safe as we should be because this Administration has not given homeland security the focused leadership and resources it demands.

On the up side, we are more aware of the threats we face and, through the Department of Homeland Security, we now have a focal point for planning, implementing and assessing our homeland security efforts. We have improved airport and airline security. We have begun to look more critically at the millions of containers that enter our ports from abroad, including pushing the borders back to help secure containers before they reach our shores. We've begun to consolidate homeland defense work at the borders and to build a new research and development capability to enlist our technological capabilities in the war against terror.

Yet experts agree we are nowhere near where we need to be. The Gilmore Commission – led by former Virginia Governor James Gilmore – recently warned of complacency about the terrorist threat and decried the lack of a clear strategy to bring about improved security, while expert panels of the Council on Foreign Relations have called the nation “still unprepared” and our first responders “drastically underfunded.”

It will take **more** than money to tackle these shortcomings, but the fact remains that homeland security will not come cheap. On first responders, for instance, these experts tell us it will take \$98 billion over five years to bring our defenses up to where they need to be. Unfortunately, the President's budget for FY 2005 is fresh evidence that the Administration is shortchanging the homeland side of the war on terrorism. Although the budget includes some modest increases for targeted programs, it actually cuts critical homeland efforts – including a stunning 30 percent cut in aid to first responders. Simply put, it is not a budget that boldly acknowledges and addresses the new threats we face as a Nation.

That is why I rise today to offer an amendment to recommit ourselves to the critical task of securing our homeland. My amendment would add \$6.8 billion to the President's proposed homeland security budget, to help our first responders, strengthen our borders and ports, prepare for the threat of bioterror, and help secure our transportation networks. The needs in each of these areas are enormous and well documented.

I wish I could say that my amendment was adding \$6.8 billion in **new** resources to these problems, but about \$2.5 billion of the amendment is needed *just to restore cuts* the President's budget makes from FY 2004 spending in these areas.

The new spending in my amendment would go to such vital causes as enabling our first responders to communicate with one another, better securing our borders with more personnel and equipment, and helping communities prepare for bioterror attack.

Some will say we cannot afford these investments, however critical. I strongly disagree. We saw, in addition to the devastating toll in human life, the economic disruption that followed the 9/11 attacks. Our former colleagues Gary Hart and Warren Rudman -- who have done so much outstanding and prescient work in this area -- have warned that worse could come, with even greater economic hardship. Furthermore, the spending in this amendment is accompanied by an equivalent amount of deficit reduction, all of which would be offset by reducing the tax cuts for those earning more than \$1 million.

There is a worrisome disconnect in the thinking of this Administration. While its national security officials come to Congress and attest to the ongoing and very real threat of terrorism, its budget reflects more of a business-as-usual approach. Allow me to lay out, more specifically, what this amendment would do and why it is so necessary.

### ***First Responders***

I am advocating \$4.4 billion in FY 05 - above the President's request -- to help ensure that first responders have the equipment, training, and other resources they need to prevent, prepare for and if necessary respond to acts of terrorism.

We all remember the heroic role police, firefighters and other first responders played on 9/11, as our nation responded to the horrific attacks of that day and braced for untold sequels that might be soon to follow. Less visible is the role many of these officials also play in attempting to prevent acts of terrorism here at home: state and local police are the eyes and ears of the community that may first detect a terrorist plot on U.S. soil or intercept a terrorist before he or she can strike. We owe these front line homeland security troops more than our admiration -- we owe them our full financial support.

Yet a distinguished panel convened by the Council on Foreign Relations found these first responders wanting for the tools they must have to confront a terrorist attack: firefighters without their own radios or breathing equipment; police departments without protective gear to respond to an attack with a chemical, biological or radiological agent; and nearly all without interoperable communications equipment. This is unacceptable and must be changed.

Let's start with the work that must be done just to undo the harmful cuts sought by the Administration. First, my proposal will restore the Administration's drastic \$1 billion cut to the State Homeland Security Grant Program, which is the main source of assistance to state and local governments and first responders for emergency planning, equipment, training, exercises, mutual aid agreements, and other preparedness activities. There is bipartisan support for restoring these cuts, reflecting the reality that all states face certain homeland funding needs and need a steady, predictable source of money -- as this program provides -- to plan wisely.

My amendment will also restore more than \$1 billion in cuts to key first responder programs in the Justice Department: the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant (LLEBG), the Edward Byrne Memorial Grant Program (BYRNE), and the Community Oriented Policing Services Program (COPs). These programs provide vital aid to help communities hire more police officers and equip them with the tools they need. Funding levels for these three programs have declined more than \$1.8 billion since FY 2002, representing a dangerous and unwise reduction at a time when the threat from terrorism, but also domestic crime, has clearly increased.

The amendment would also provide \$400 million to restore a 33 percent cut in the vital Fire Act program, which provides direct support to thousands of fire departments around the country, and to bring it to full funding. And it restores a \$9 million cut to the Emergency Management Planning Grants program, which supports the capacity of state and local governments to respond to emergencies of all kinds.

All of these programs are integral to the strength of our first responders and it is incomprehensible that we would cut them at a time the terrorist threat remains high. But we must do more than just hold the line – we need to dramatically improve our homeland defenses in our communities.

My proposal would provide \$1 billion in new funding to be dedicated to helping first responders obtain interoperable communications equipment so they can “talk to one another” when responding to events. The lack of communications interoperability has received substantial attention since the September 11, 2001 attacks revealed major problems with communication between police and fire fighters at the World Trade Center in New York. But the problem is hardly unique to New York. Federal officials involved with this issue report that – at best -- only 14 states have communications equipment that allows public safety agencies to talk to each other during a terrorist attack or other emergency. The price tag for fixing the problem nationwide has been estimated as high as \$18 billion, and the lead federal official on this issue has stated that, at the present rate, it will take twenty years to achieve full interoperability in our country. This is much too long.

Yet, the President’s 05 budget actually takes a step backwards by eliminating relatively small grant programs at FEMA that were dedicated to interoperability. Instead, funding for interoperability must now compete with funds for protective gear, training, exercises, and other equipment. My proposal would dedicate \$1 billion specifically for interoperability to provide a significant lift to states’ efforts to overcome a critical obstacle facing emergency responders across America. In addition to equipment, this would include funding necessary for planning, evaluation, deployment, and training on the use of modern interoperable communications.

Another \$1 billion in this amendment would go to fully fund the SAFER Act (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) that is necessary to hire 10,000 additional fire fighters. According to the International Association of Fire Fighters, the shortage of fire fighters has reached crisis proportions. two-thirds of all fire departments do not have adequate staffing, falling below the accepted industry standards developed by the National Fire Protection Association and, more to the point, putting those firefighters who *are* on the job in danger. The SAFER Act, which Congress finally passed last year due to the outstanding leadership of my colleague Senator Dodd, authorizes \$7.6 billion in grants over seven years to career, volunteer, and combination fire departments hire new firefighters. At a time when budget cuts have forced some local jurisdictions to actually reduce the number of first responders, this funding is necessary to help protect firefighters and to provide the emergency response capabilities communities want and expect.

### ***Port Security***

Virtually every expert analysis of terrorist threats to the United States focuses on the critical issue of port security. Small wonder – millions of containers arrive at U.S. ports each year, coming from all parts of the globe and subject to only limited, if any, inspection. The ports are at once a tempting portal into the U.S. for dangerous cargo, and a vital economic conduit that – if shuttered due to a terrorist assault – could cause devastating disruption of the nation’s economic life’s blood. Earlier this year, the FBI testified that terrorist organizations are looking “for any holes in the port security system to exploit.” Yet in the face of such risk, the Administration proposes to cut spending on port security grants and eliminate Operation Safe Commerce, an innovative program to improve the security of container traffic into this country. In addition, the President’s budget puts Coast Guard fleet and equipment modernization on a slow boat – at the Administration’s pace, the Deepwater modernization program will take 22 years. A 22-year modernization is practically an oxymoron.

My amendment would provide \$900 million in additional resources for port and container security. About half of that would go to restore Operation Safe Commerce and to improve physical security at our ports. bring port security grants – at only a suggested \$46 million in the President’s budget – to \$500 million. The Coast Guard has estimated it will cost \$7.5 billion – and \$1.5 billion this year – just to provide all ports with minimum security measures and implement the Maritime Transportation Security Act. The grants help finance measures such as fencing and surveillance to better secure the ports and – with them – our vital trade links. Operations Safe Commerce has explored new technologies to track container traffic and can provide a valuable think tank for new approaches to secure their travel into our country.

The rest of the money would go to accelerating the Deepwater program, a 22-year Coast Guard fleet modernization program. Since 9/11, we have turned to the Coast Guard again and again for a growing roster of homeland security needs –even as we expect them to continue their outstanding work on non-defense missions such as fisheries enforcement and search and rescue. Yet This outstanding agency operates with virtually the oldest naval fleet in the world – 39<sup>th</sup> out of 41. Senators from both parties – and even the Heritage Foundation – have called for more money for Deepwater. Not only is it the right thing to do, it will actually save money in the long run since the longer Deepwater takes to complete, the more the Coast Guard must spend on maintenance of the decaying fleet

### ***Bioterror***

More than two years after the anthrax attacks demonstrated our country’s vulnerability to bioterrorism, our efforts to protect the American people against biological attacks remains disorganized and underfunded. Indeed, a recent report by the Trust for Public Health concluded that communities are “only modestly better prepared” to respond to a bioterror attack than they were before 9/11. Yet here again, the Administration actually wants to *cut* spending – contradicting the opinion of even its own official responsible for bioterror preparedness.

The President’s budget cuts \$105 million from Centers for Disease Control grants to help public health agencies prepare for bioterrorism, and another \$39 million from a program to help hospitals expand their capacity to treat victims of a bioterror attack. Where bioterror is concerned, these health officials are our first responders and we must give them support

commensurate to the threat. It is true that The President would provide some new money for surveillance to detect a bioterror attack, but this will be of limited use if we have no resources to respond to an attack once we detect it. One public health official likened it to “laying off firefighters while investing in new hoses and ladders.”

Therefore, my amendment would add \$500 million for bioterror preparedness, to restore those cuts and significantly expand the hospital grant program. The health community has identified more than \$11 billion in additional needed medical supplies, protective gear for staff and other essentials to respond to a bioterror attack. At the current pace, it would take more than 20 years before hospitals could provide even basic care in the event of such an attack. We must speed up this effort, and my amendment would help us begin down that road. The investments we make here will have the added benefit of improving our capacity to respond to naturally occurring diseases, such as a severe flu outbreak.

### ***Border Security***

Our border officials process more than 440 million visits each year, and police more than 7,000 miles of border with Canada and Mexico. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Congress recognized we must spend more to make this system work – to facilitate lawful visitors and trade, while weeding out and halting those who pose a threat. We passed the Patriot Act and the Enhanced Border Security Act, both of which called for significant new border personnel. But since then we have fallen short – hundreds upon hundreds short – of meeting those targets. Indeed one of the only targets that was met – posting 1,000 Border Patrol agents along the Northern Border – was reportedly achieved only by shifting agents from the Southern Border. This is not real homeland security.

My amendment would provide \$500 million for additional border personnel, as well as for needed equipment and technology for border security. The needs are extensive and include portable, interoperable communications equipment, surveillance systems and fingerprint identification equipment. As US VISIT – the entry/exit system mandated by Congress – is expanded to land ports, we will need expanded facilities to process visitors. Total implementation costs for the program could reach \$10 billion.

Border security *can* make a difference. The September 11<sup>th</sup> Commission discovered that one alert inspector in Miami had apparently stopped one of the would-be hijackers simply by conducting a probing interview at the airport. But we cannot expect such high performance if critical homeland defense workers such as these are overworked and poorly equipped.

### ***Transportation Security***

We know from 9/11, and from terrorist attacks around the world, that transportation networks pose a tempting target to would-be attackers. This knowledge spurred Congress to create the Transportation Security Agency in record time. Now we must give the agency the resources to fulfill its mandate. My amendment would provide \$500 million to make further inroads on aviation security and expand to other modes of transportation, which have been largely neglected thus far.

Although TSA has made headway on aspects of passenger and baggage screening, much work remains to close known gaps in our aviation security. Specifically, I would direct additional funding to developing systems to screen air cargo, to screen passengers for explosives, and to screen airport workers with access to aircraft.

About a quarter of all air cargo travels on passenger planes. Yet, despite all the added precautions we've developed for air passengers and their bags, this cargo remains largely uninspected – only about 5 percent is screened. All-cargo jets pose a similar vulnerability. We must also develop effective systems to screen cargo and implement short-term solutions at once. Another vulnerability is explosives: current passenger screening only detects metallic threats, such as guns or knives, not explosives. Yet we know this is not an obscure threat – would-be terrorist Richard Reid was able to bring about 10 ounces of explosives onto an American Airlines flight and was only stopped from igniting them by an alert passenger on board. There are promising technologies in this area, but we must spend money to develop them. Finally, many airport workers with access to aircraft and sensitive areas of the airport receive little scrutiny. We must do better.

However incomplete the work on aviation security, the federal effort to secure other modes of transportation has hardly begun. According to a recent news report, we have intelligence suggesting that Al Qaeda is looking at derailing trains, possibly carrying hazardous material. GAO has also identified vulnerabilities regarding rail shipments of hazardous materials, as well as protective measures that have not yet been taken. Yet despite such concerns, little has been done to assess the risks to our rail system or to deploy countermeasures. Similarly, we know from the deadly sarin attack on the Tokyo subway and suicide bombers on Israeli buses, that mass transit presents an inviting target to possible terrorist activity.

The American Public Transportation Association has identified at least \$6 billion in transit security needs, such as video surveillance and chemical and biological detection systems. But DHS has released only \$115 million in transit security grants thus far, and no money is set aside for this purpose in the President's budget.

***Conclusion***

We have a long way to go before we fulfill the promise we made to the American people following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, to adequately secure our homeland. We should approach this task with the same unity, resolve and resources that we have brought to the war on terror overseas. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.