

Opening Statement of Chairman Carper
April 17, 2013
“The Homeland Security Department’s Budget Submission for Fiscal Year 2014”

My thanks to Secretary Napolitano for joining us to discuss the President’s budget request for the Department of Homeland Security for fiscal year 2014. Before we start, I first want to offer my condolences to the victims of the tragic Boston marathon terrorist attacks and their families. I ask that we now have a moment of silence to remember the victims and their families. Thank you.

I also want to thank our first responders and brave bystanders who selflessly rushed into the chaotic scene to care for those who were injured, and the law enforcement personnel at the federal, state and local level who continue to investigate this incident. I am carefully monitoring this situation and will continue to do so. In the end, we’ll get to the bottom of this incident and bring those responsible to justice. Moving forward, it is critical that all Americans recognize that we all have a shared responsibility in keeping each other safe and we should all embrace the adage, ‘if you see something, say something,’ and report anything suspicious to authorities immediately.

Unfortunately, such tragic acts of terror serve as a reminder of the critically important mission given to the Department of Homeland Security. Crafting a budget for an agency this complex and important is never easy and is particularly challenging in this fiscal environment.

The Administration’s \$39 billion dollar budget request makes some very tough choices. It cuts the Department’s budget by roughly two percent over 2012 levels but it is at least consistent with what Congress appropriated in 2013 for the Department, before sequestration cuts were applied. Still, this level is lower than what Congress appropriated in 2009.

Stepping back and thinking about all of the challenges that our country and this Department have faced since 2009 –the Christmas Day bomber, the Time Square bomber, the Yemen Cargo Bomb plot, Hurricane Sandy, the ever-changing and ever-growing cyber threat, and now the Boston attack – it’s easy to become concerned with this budget request. That said, we are facing extremely difficult budgetary times and sacrifices must be made.

While I recognize some important missions may not receive all of the funding they or we would want in a perfect world, all departments and agencies in government must share in the sacrifices required to rein in the deficit. The Secretary seems to have taken this message to heart, identifying \$1.3 billion in cost-savings this year and more than \$4 billion since 2009 and continues to move to a risk-based approach to save more money.

I’m happy to see that this budget proposes a much needed increase for cybersecurity which will help the Department fulfill its significant cyber responsibilities. Of course, additional resources alone are not going to get the job done – that is why passing comprehensive bipartisan legislation to compliment the President’s Executive Order and address the cyber threat is one of my highest priorities.

I also welcomed the Administration's continued commitment to securing our nation's borders by maintaining staffing for the Border Patrol at its current historic levels and adding more than 3,400 Customs and Border Protection officers to staff our ports of entry. These critical resources are paid for, in part, with modest fee increases.

During my recent trips to our borders in Arizona and Michigan, I heard local mayors, business leaders, and frontline officers say they need more help at our ports of entry. I believe that if something is worth having, it's worth paying for, and it's worth it to America to better facilitate trade and travel at our ports of entry. This is why I agree with the President's proposal to use modest fee increases to pay for more CBP officers. These efforts will build on the tremendous progress we have made in securing the border over the past decade. I look forward to reviewing the immigration bill soon to be introduced by the Senator John McCain and seven of our colleagues to make sure the bill makes smart investments in border security, focusing on deploying force multipliers that can help our frontline agents be more effective, and efficient.

Lastly, I was encouraged to see the increase in funding for the consolidation of the Department's Headquarters at the St. Elizabeths Campus which I visited just this week. The \$105 million in this request, in conjunction with the money that the General Services Administration has requested, will yield real savings to taxpayers by allowing us to stop leasing buildings all over the DC metro area and helping the Department improve management and increase morale.

With that said, I'm concerned that this budget's significant cuts to several key homeland priorities may be penny wise and pound foolish. The cuts to management, for instance, are shortsighted and will, I fear, undermine the progress the Department has made in this area. Last year for the first time, DHS earned a qualified audit opinion on all of its Fiscal Year 2012 financial statements. And in its latest 'High Risk' report, the Government Accountability Office confirmed that there has been considerable progress at the Department in integrating its components and in strengthening its management. We can't lose this momentum. Better management will yield better results and stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

I'm also concerned by the proposed reduction in frontline personnel at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As we work to reform our immigration laws, I believe that ICE will play a critical role. These reductions, then, could undermine our efforts to implement new reforms. We also need to do a better job of managing our detention efforts to ensure that criminals are kept off the streets. While acknowledging that the sequestration that Congress launched is partly to blame, I was disappointed with the management failures that led ICE to release a number of felons among the more than 2,000 detainees two months ago because of budget constraints.

Another area of concern is the \$714 million request to fund the construction of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Kansas. I understand the importance of studying animal diseases, but I hope we can avoid providing full funding in 2014 alone for a multi-year construction project by building in logical segments over a two-year period and, thus, avoid taking away resources from other agencies like ICE, the Coast Guard, and FEMA next year.

Finally, I am concerned by proposed cuts in the support DHS provides to state and local governments and first responders through homeland security grants, exercises and training. As we saw clearly this week, state and local officials are the ones who will inevitably be on the front lines responding to a terrorist attack. While acknowledging that our approach must be risk-based, I want to ensure that the Department is able to continue to help state and local responders with the plans, training and equipment they need to respond effectively, as they did so admirably in Boston this week.

The elephant in the room, of course, is sequestration. If implemented, it would take another 5 percent off the Department's already limited budget. These cuts, I fear, would interfere with Departmental operations and management and with its ability to fulfill its missions. We must find a better way to deal with our budget crisis. We need a comprehensive plan to rein in our federal debt and deficit.

Finally, as my colleagues have heard me say many times, I favor a 'grand bargain' that does three key things: (1) raises revenues to levels comparable to those which enabled us to achieve four balanced budgets in the Clinton Administration; (2) enacts entitlement reform that saves money, avoids savaging older people or poor people and keeps these programs strong for the long haul; and (3) looks in every nook and cranny of the federal government and ask, 'How can we get a better result for less money?' Now is the time to make this grand bargain. The cost of the failure to do so is just too high.