

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

**The Homeland Security Department's
Budget Submission for Fiscal Year 2012**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
February 17, 2011

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When Congress and the Administration formulate the budget for the country, we are establishing our national priorities. Controlling spending, reducing our debt, and funding highly effective programs to protect our nation are among those priorities.

Yet, the President's proposed budget does far too little to rein in spending to bring the federal debt under control. The President's budget would double the publicly held debt by 2013 and triple it by 2020. Such a rate of spending is simply unsustainable and puts our nation on a ruinous fiscal course.

Today, we will review one component of that budget: the proposal for the Department of Homeland Security. Protecting our nation and our citizens is not just a line item; it is a top priority.

With tight budgets, we must work together to eliminate wasteful and unproductive programs and to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of government operations. The criteria used by the Administration to make these decisions, however, are opaque.

For example, homeland security grants help our local first responders improve their effectiveness and serve as a force multiplier for federal resources. Reducing the funding for first responders could undermine our state and local partners who are the first on the scene when natural disasters and terrorist attacks strike.

In testimony before the House last week, Secretary Napolitano stated that "in some ways, the [terrorist] threat facing us is at its most heightened state" since 9/11. That is why we need to take a close look at the funding of DHS programs.

I am disappointed that the Administration again has proposed to limit Operation Stonegarden to the southwest border. Operation Stonegarden should be used to help secure both our northern and southern borders by funding joint operations between the Border Patrol and state and local law enforcement.

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A recent GAO report found that Customs and Border Protection does not have the ability to detect illegal activity across most of our border with Canada. It noted that the Border Patrol has effective control of only 32 miles of the 4,000 mile northern border. Illegal crossers include individuals seeking to illegally immigrate, criminals trafficking in humans and drugs, and, potentially, terrorists.

The smuggling of methamphetamine is just one example of the growing problems along our northern border. The State of Maine shares 600 miles of our border with Canada and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has cited Maine's "size and predominantly rural population" as ideal conditions for meth trafficking from Canada.

Despite the findings of the GAO report and the need for better cooperation with state and local partners to secure vast stretches of our northern border, the Administration again has proposed restricting Operation Stonegarden funding to the southern border. Moreover, despite the proven effectiveness of the Stonegarden program, the budget proposes to reduce its funding by \$10 million.

To cite one example of the program's success from my state, Stonegarden funds were instrumental in the arrest and conviction of an individual involved in bulk cash smuggling. During a Stonegarden Operation, a Fort Kent, Maine, police officer caught this criminal attempting to smuggle \$137,000 in cash across the border. The officer was patrolling an area well outside Fort Kent, where he would not have been able to patrol without Stonegarden funding.

The President's budget request also reduces funding for FIRE Act grants by \$140 million. FIRE Act grants provide fire departments with the support they need to purchase equipment and vehicles and to conduct the training and exercises necessary for firefighters to perform their jobs well. We must preserve this vital program.

The Coast Guard's fleet is among the oldest in the world. Yet, the men and women of the Coast Guard continue to perform their many different missions with a high degree of success. They deserve a fleet worthy of their efforts. But, the President's budget proposes a 22 percent reduction in the Coast Guard's Deepwater program - a cut of \$259 million. Much of this cut is due to the fact that no funding is proposed for the sixth National Security Cutter (NSC). This will push completion of the eighth, and final, NSC back to 2018. As the Coast Guard's newest and largest cutters, the NSC will replace 12 aging and deteriorating High Endurance Cutters.

It is likely that this delay also will affect the start of construction for the first Offshore Patrol Cutter planned in FY 2016, which is another key asset for the Coast Guard. While this budget avoids the disastrous personnel

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cuts in last year's proposed budget, it is vital that we recapitalize the Coast Guard's aging fleet - additional delays will jeopardize our ability to counter future threats.

On the positive side, I applaud the Department's efforts to improve efficiency by streamlining business practices. The Department claims to have found more than \$800 million in efficiency gains. This certainly is a move in the right direction.

I also was pleased to see increases to the Department's cyber security budget. After an unwise proposal from the Administration to cut the DHS cyber budget last year, this year's budget includes a nearly \$67 million increase to enhance the Department's cyber security capabilities.

Senator Lieberman, Senator Carper, and I have long pushed for the Department to have the authorities it needs to meet its cyber security responsibilities for both federal civilian systems and for the private sector. We introduced a cyber security bill last Congress with DHS at the focal point, and will introduce a modified version of that bill today that will contain additional protections to explicitly prevent the President from "shutting down" the Internet - an unfortunate and wildly inaccurate myth about our prior bill. While experts question whether anyone can technically "shut down" the Internet in the United States, our bill will have specific language making it crystal clear that such actions are expressly prohibited.

I am disappointed that this budget does not do more to root out waste. A good example of this is on FEMA improper payments. While we want victims of disasters to receive appropriate disaster assistance, we need to ensure that criminals do not defraud the system. This Committee's investigation of the government's response to Hurricane Katrina, with the assistance of GAO, identified more than \$1 billion in improper payments.

According to the DHS IG, FEMA has stopped attempting to recover improper disaster assistance payments made after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and subsequent disasters. The Inspector General identified approximately 160,000 applicants that had received improper disaster assistance payments totaling more than \$643 million that have yet to be recouped.

Even more disturbing, FEMA's efforts to recoup these improper payments ended in 2007 after a court found FEMA's recovery procedures to be inadequate. More than three years later, FEMA has not acted to recover these payments.

At a time when budgets are tight, difficult decisions must be made. I look forward to discussing the DHS budget with Secretary Napolitano.