

The Local Role in Homeland Security
Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman

December 11, 2001

Good morning. It's a pleasure to welcome everyone to today's hearing on the Local Role in Homeland Security, part of an ongoing series of hearings by the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee intended to oversee and improve the federal government's response to the urgent set of terrorist threats our country and our people now face.

On September 11, as we watched the attacks in horror and disbelief, we also watched with great admiration and appreciation as local and state governments rose to the occasion to protect and serve their people. That response dramatically demonstrated what is true no matter the nature of the emergency or size of the locality: in America's war against terrorism, city, county and state governments and workers bear primary responsibility for providing our citizens with the services and safety they need.

The local role is much deeper and broader than emergency response. State, county and city agencies are the primary providers of public health, transportation, and social support services. And as the daily law enforcement presence in our communities, they play a lead role in helping to prevent terrorist acts from happening in the first place.

All of this means that in order to fight terrorism effectively, counties, cities, and states need new technology, training and talent—all very expensive commodities. This morning the U.S. Conference of Mayors is releasing a detailed inventory of needs it has identified. The National Governors Association and the National Association of Counties have recently issued similar reports; the Governors estimate the cost to our states of guarding against public health and critical infrastructure threats to be \$4 billion in the coming fiscal year, and county officials have asked for, among other financial assistance, a new \$3 billion federal block grant for localities to meet these challenges.

But this morning, we want to talk as much about improving methods and relationships as about providing money. This committee wants to learn what federal policies, practices and procedures should be put in place to help states and localities do their vital job better... and in what new ways we can work together to meet and defeat the terrorist threat. Our goal is to leverage the strengths of each branch and level of government so that we're doing everything in our power to protect against terrorism... and if and when terrorism strikes again, to count on a swift, sure and seamless response.

From recent events, it's clear that we have some ways to go. Too often, in responding to homeland security threats we've faced to date, the federal and local governments

have not worked hand in hand, but have tripped over each other's feet. A number of local officials, for example, have expressed frustration with what they perceive as a lack of information sharing by the FBI. To address their concerns, FBI Director Mueller has convened an advisory group of state and local law enforcement officials and indicated a willingness to speed up security clearances for local officials and establish more joint terrorism task forces.

Similar gaps and communications failures were revealed during our response to the anthrax attacks, during which the federal CDC and others, including the Office of Homeland Security, the Secretary of HHS, and the Post Office sent inconsistent and confusing messages to states, counties and cities—even to members of Congress. According to an article in yesterday's *New York Times*, "for all the calls to vigilance in a domestic defense drive like no other, many state and local governments are starting to balk because of the costs and the frustration over what they see as the federal government's confusing stream of intelligence information and security alerts."

Whether or not this issue remains on the front page, we need to get on the same page, and we need to do it without delay.

The challenge is exacerbated by the fragmented approach to counter-terrorism at the federal level—an approach that I believe would be greatly improved by the creation of a full-fledged, cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security with clear lines of authority and the power to get things done.

Unless and until such a department is created, we will have to work with the Office of Homeland Security, as currently structured. I am hopeful that Homeland Security Director Ridge, as a former Governor, will make clear that he knows that state and local governments must sit at the table with the federal government. He has, for example, announced his intention to form a state and local government committee to advise the Office of Homeland Security. That is a good first step—but we must take pains to ensure that local concerns are ingrained in the development of the national strategy from the very beginning, rather than being occasionally injected in reaction to mistakes, oversights or complaints.

I look forward to working here in Congress to support local government efforts so that, from the grassroots to the top of the federal organizational tree, we are all working in harmony to make the ground on which Americans stand as safe and secure as possible.

In closing, let me place our efforts in an historical context. Our founders understood that a federal government would be better at some things, and that state and local governments, which are closer to the people, would be better at others.

Because this is the first modern war fought both abroad and on our homefront, the war against terrorism represents the intersection of one traditional federal responsibility—waging war and securing the nation—and one traditional local

government responsibility—providing for the public health and safety of our communities. As a result, it should lead us to rethink some traditional federal relationships and reaffirm others, with the goal of leveraging our strengths to make us a more secure society. I look at this as both a formidable challenge and an exciting opportunity.

Together, we can ensure that we will look back and see September 11 as the beginning of a new period of preparedness—and not the first chapter in a new era of vulnerability. On the front lines of that preparedness will be state, county and local officials like those we are pleased to have with us today.