

“The Department of Homeland Security: The Road Ahead”
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
Senator Joe Lieberman
January 26, 2005

Thank you, Madam Chairman, for calling this hearing - the first of this newly named Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. As always, it is a pleasure to work with you. I also want to welcome the new members to this Committee, Senators Warner, Domenici, Chafee, and Coburn. I look forward to working with each of you as well.

Madame Chairman, even before its jurisdiction was formally expanded, this Committee took the lead in restructuring our government to make our nation safer.

We have had some historic and far-reaching successes. Last Congress the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act dramatically remade an intelligence structure designed to fight the Cold War into one that is designed to address the 21st Century challenges outlined by the 9-11 commission.

Even before the 9-11 Commission, we acted to address glaring weaknesses in our homeland defense by creating the Department of Homeland Security. Scores of federal agencies had some responsibility for our homeland security defense, but no single agency was clearly in charge. Our homeland defense was disorganized and because everyone was responsible, no one was accountable.

Since its creation, the Department has become a focal point in the fight against terrorism and is now the place where citizens, state and local officials, first responders, and the private sector can look for leadership and resources in protecting the American people from terrorist attack.

But the Department of Homeland Security - which just celebrated its second birthday on January 23 - is still just a toddler. Those of us who worked to bring the Department into existence did not expect that the difficult job of creating a cohesive whole from so many different parts could be accomplished overnight or without bumps.

This was the largest reorganization in our government in over a half-century: we knew there would be significant challenges and difficult

obstacles to overcome. But because the Department's mission is vital to securing our nation, and identifying and systematically removing those obstacles must be a top priority for the Administration and Congress.

The Department has made some progress, but as we will hear today, it simply has not made enough progress - and as a consequence, the American people are not as safe as they should be.

The absence of a well-designed strategy is one of the Department's shortcomings. I'm struck by the comment in the CSIS-Heritage report that Secretary Ridge was too often consumed by what was in his "in-box" - the immediate crisis of the day - and the report's recommendation that a new undersecretary is needed to develop a strategic homeland security policy.

I agree, it is critical that we have a coherent plan so that our national priorities are known, and everyone's responsibilities and roles are clear.

The good news is that legislation we passed at the end of the last Congress requires D.H.S. to lay out its overall strategy as part of its long-term budgeting process. At the time this legislation passed, Senator Collins

and I emphasized how important this was to our homeland security efforts and what we expected to be included in the plan. I look forward to reviewing the plan and hope it will mark a critical step toward establishing the priorities and accountability we need for our homeland security effort.

Secondly, D.H.S. will need focused leadership and skilled management to address the shortcomings that we will hear about today. The Department must make certain that those officials responsible for integrating disparate systems and processes – the CIO, CFO, and others – have sufficient authority to get the job done.

We cannot tolerate a Department where lines of authority do not align with responsibilities. From the reports that some of our witnesses will discuss today that seems to be precisely what we have.

Nor can we tolerate a Department where the officials responsible for overseeing and managing the Department do not have adequate resources at their disposal to get the job done.

Thus far, we have not made the necessary investments and several highly regarded bipartisan reports have agreed. We have not invested enough in securing our ports or our rail systems, defending our borders or preparing for a bioterrorism attack. Last year, I proposed a total of \$14 billion above the President's budget to address these and other homeland security needs. Unfortunately, the Administration proposed significant cuts, government-wide, for first responders. This is not the direction we should be going in and I hope the Administration will take a different course this year.

Today we will hear some proposals for reform. As we consider these proposals, I want to note that the Collins-Lieberman intelligence and terrorism prevention law also contains some very significant measures to bolster our homeland security, and will hopefully provide DHS and our government more tools with which to succeed. I will be working to make sure that the Administration faithfully implements these new provisions.

Madam Chairman, thank you again for holding this important hearing. I look forward to the witnesses' thoughts on where they believe the

Department of Homeland Security is at present and, most importantly, where it can and must go in the future if it is to fulfill its vital mission.

Thank you.