

Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
“Nuclear Terrorism: Providing Medical Care and Meeting Basic Needs in the Aftermath –
the Federal Response
Washington, DC
June 26, 2008

This is the fifth in a series of hearings this Committee has held to examine a question that its natural to want to turn away from, but we really cant and that is the state of our nation’s preparedness to mount an effective response to a terrorist detonation of a nuclear weapon in a major American city.

While working to prevent such an attack is and will continue to be our top priority, we know that the risk is real and we cannot act as if can be fully eliminated.

A nuclear attack on our homeland would be sudden and swift – devastating and deadly, and a failure to develop and test a comprehensive plan for dealing with the aftermath would magnify its impact.

In this hearing – “Nuclear Terrorism: Providing Medical Care and Meeting Basic Needs in the Aftermath – the Federal Response” – we will examine some very specific public health and public safety challenges we know we will face and ask what our state of preparedness is to respond at this time.

After a terrorist nuclear attack, local and state emergency responders would be the first on the scene and must therefore adequately plan for the important medical responsibilities that they would need to fulfill in the first days after such an attack.

In that regard, we are pleased to have with us Chief James Schwartz, the fire chief of Arlington County, Virginia, a high risk target area that is adjacent to the District of Columbia and home of the Pentagon.

However, because no one state, county, or municipality has the capabilities to respond fully to a nuclear attack, a rapid coordinated response by the federal government will also be critically necessary across the full range of medical and mass care missions.

To better understand how prepared the federal government is to assume that critical role, we will hear testimony from Chief David Paulsion of FEMA, which is responsible for the overall government response as well as the lead agency for mass sheltering and feeding of displaced populations.

We will also hear from Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response RADM Craig Vanderwagen from the Department of Health and Human Services, which has the lead role in providing medical care and public health consequences; and from Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense Paul McHale, who is responsible for overseeing a variety of support and lead roles in DoD’s responsibility for defense support of civilian authorities.

Thank you for being here.

