



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

The Nominations of Robert D. Jamison to be Under Secretary for National Protection and Programs and W. Ross Ashley III

To be Assistant Administrator for the Office of Grants Programs

Senator Joe Lieberman

November 9, 2007

Thank you all for coming today. We are here to consider nominees to two important positions at the Department of Homeland Security. The first is Robert D. Jamison, who has been nominated as Under Secretary of DHS, with responsibility for the National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD), followed by W. Ross Ashley III, nominated as Assistant Administrator for FEMA in charge of grant programs.

Both jobs cover critical aspects of our homeland security from cyber security to ensuring that our state and local partners have the resources they need on the front lines of our defense against all disasters, whether natural or man-made.

The post Mr. Jamison has been nominated to is relatively new and, frankly, consists of a medley of responsibilities, including cyber security, infrastructure protection, foreign traveler screening, emergency communications, and risk analysis.

I have several concerns that I'd like to discuss with Mr. Jamieson. The Department continues to work with the private sector to ensure risk assessments are performed for the nation's most critical infrastructure, although, we are behind in this effort. The process must be sped up as experience tells us terrorists are likely to target large structures and systems that will cause maximum havoc.

The Department must also move ahead expeditiously with the new chemical site security program, and must ensure that the program is sufficiently rigorous to significantly reduce this homeland security vulnerability.

I am further concerned that the Office of Infrastructure Protection is heavily dependent upon outside contractors. Half the office staff is made up of contractors. As a matter of fact, 42 percent of the grants program directorate is also made up of contractors -- and they are performing key functions like helping figure out the methodology by which we allocate grants. The Government Accountability Office recently testified before this committee that overdependence on contractors deprives the government of the institutional knowledge it needs to perform its functions over the long run. I will want to know how Mr. Jamieson and Mr. Ashley plan to prevent this from happening within their areas of authority at DHS

We also face serious challenges protecting government computer systems and databases, another area that will fall within Mr. Jamieson's portfolio. With persistent vacancies in key positions, and all too frequent reports of missing computers and lost equipment, everyone agrees we have not made sufficient progress, given the threats that exist to our cyber systems.

I am pleased however, that the Department is now busy working on how to address many of these cyber security problems in a coordinated way. Just this week, the Administration announced its new Cyber Initiative to strengthen the protection of all government systems and databases. The program is still under development, and of course much about it remains classified, but I look forward to hearing as much detail as can be discussed in a public setting.

The position to which Mr. Ashley has been nominated – Assistant FEMA Administrator, heading the Grant Programs Directorate – is of special interest to me for a couple of reasons. I have made it a point over the past four years to work as hard as I could to obtain extra funding for our under-trained and under-equipped police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical workers who are on the front lines of the disasters that strike American communities.

In February, for the fourth year in a row, the President's FY 2008 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security would have cut crucial support for these brave men and women - slashing overall homeland security grant funding by a staggering 40 percent. That is unconscionable to me and would have been tantamount to disarming in the middle of a war. I hope you recognize the ongoing needs of first responders, Mr. Ashley, and I look forward to hearing your views on grant budgeting.

I am also keenly interested in grants because of legislation we passed earlier this year to fulfill most of the remaining 9/11 Commission recommendations. That measure, now signed into law, calls for substantial funding increases for training, planning, and new equipment for first responders.

Furthermore, we finally settled a years-long dispute over how to dispense homeland security grants in a way that would provide even more anti-terrorism funding on the basis of risk, while giving each state a smaller percentage of guaranteed funding for some basic level of preparedness. We also authorized more funding for key programs designed to help all states prepare for natural disasters and other threats.

Implementation of this provision is very important to me, Mr. Ashley, so I look forward to hearing your plans.

If confirmed, these two nominees before us today will have to work closely with our nation's first responders, with the private sector, and with state and local officials to provide overall strategic guidance. We have made important strides, but still have much to do to protect our critical infrastructure, while also preparing ourselves for the next disaster that inevitably will come. Thank You.