



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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U.S. Senate Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee Opening Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Robert C. Byrd

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Senate Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee on Thursday held a hearing to examine the proposed Fiscal 2008 budget for the department. As part of that hearing, Subcommittee Chairman Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia delivered the following opening statement.

Mr. Secretary, I thank you for appearing before the Subcommittee today. You manage a department that employs over 192,000 dedicated men and women. These workers serve on the front lines, securing our ports and waterways, securing our borders, enforcing our immigration laws, protecting the 600 million flyers who use our airports each year, and responding to disasters. I commend them for their dedication and their service to preserving our freedoms and securing our homeland.

Two years ago, Senator Craig and I, with support from Chairman Gregg, offered an amendment to begin the process of hiring and training a significant number of border patrol agents and immigration investigators. Despite opposition from the White House, the funds for enhanced border security were enacted into law. Since 2004, on a bipartisan basis, we have increased the number of border patrol agents by 4,000, the number of immigration enforcement personnel by 1,373, and the number of detention beds by 9,150.

Mr. Secretary, I am pleased that the President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2008 includes significant additional resources for improving security at our borders. Regrettably, the President's Budget does not commit significant resources to other known vulnerabilities in this country. The Administration continues to attempt to secure the nation on the cheap.

In every State of the Union Address since the attacks on 9/11, the President has raised the specter of another attack. In January, he said, "Every success against the terrorists is a reminder of the shoreless ambitions of this enemy." In the sixth year since our nation was attacked, I wish I could report to you that the dangers had ended. They have not.

Yet, when you dig through the details and decipher the book-cooking in the President's budget, and truly understand the consequences of the budget, the increase that is proposed for homeland security is only 1.4 percent.

The Administration has a huge credibility gap when it comes to homeland security. In August, after the arrests in Britain of potential terrorists who plotted to blow up commercial airliners over the Atlantic Ocean, you elevated the threat risk level in the aviation sector to orange, or high, and it remains there today. Yet, the President's Budget that is before the Subcommittee proposes to cut funding for purchasing and installing explosives detection equipment at airports by 17 percent.

According to your own Department's Nationwide Plan Review, 61 percent of states and 69 percent of urban areas do not have adequate plans to respond to a catastrophic event. Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma certainly proved that we are not prepared to respond to such an event, or a mass evacuation. Yet, the President's Budget proposes to cut first responder grants by \$1.2 billion, and to freeze funding for Emergency Management Performance Grants.

In recent years, there have been deadly attacks on trains in London, Madrid, Moscow, Tokyo, and Mumbai, India. Hundreds of innocent people have lost their lives. The Department has responded with unenforceable policy directives, two small pilot projects, the results of which have not been applied nationally, and a budget that proposes to fund the mass transit and rail security program at the inadequate 2007 level of \$175 million.

I also fear that this Department is far too reliant on what I would call paper security, instead of real security. The Department is reliant on standards that are not enforced, and on reports prepared by contractors that are never executed. Five years since 9/11, the majority of cargo containers that are loaded onto passenger aircraft are not inspected. We rely on a paper process for determining the threat potential of 3,800 freight forwarders who have access to air cargo in 10,000 facilities. Congress has added funding for 300 air cargo inspectors, none of whom are being used to actually inspect cargo.

With regard to inspecting the eleven million cargo containers that are shipped into this country, we physically inspect only five to seven percent. How can you ride herd on an aggressive and regular basis over more than 6,100 trading partners in nearly 60 countries who ship cargo into this country with only 157 Supply Chain Security Specialists? And yet the President does not seek additional Security Specialists for FY 2008.

Mr. Secretary, you have taken on the task of managing a Department with an organization that was flawed at its inception. In its short four year history, the Department has been reorganized nine times. I know you are committed to securing the homeland. I do not understand why this Administration insists on hamstringing the Department with a status quo budget. Can you explain that? Can anyone? I doubt it.

Mr. Secretary, you have a tough job. Following any opening remarks that Senator Cochran might have, we look forward to your testimony.

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