

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

**The Department of Homeland Security's
Budget Submission for Fiscal Year 2011**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
February 24, 2010

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Budgets reflect our national priorities, and homeland security must rank high on our priority list. Last year I expressed concern about the budget cuts for the Department of Homeland Security forecast in the Administration's first five-year budget. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2011, the Administration had projected a declining budget that would have resulted in a total reduction of 4.5 percent.

But perhaps in response to the attempted Christmas Day attack and the numerous homegrown terrorist plots last year, the Administration has thankfully reversed course. The President's budget request would increase the Department's funding for next year by 2.6 percent. While this is a welcome change, the overall increase does not tell the full story.

Almost 20 percent of this proposed increase - \$200 million - is dedicated to providing security in large metropolitan areas in the United States for the trials of suspected terrorists now held at Guantanamo Bay. These terrorists could be tried on military bases before military tribunals, without incurring this unnecessary expense and security risk. Given all the demands on the budget, why spend hundreds of millions of dollars to move the trials to vulnerable locations within the United States when there are safer alternatives?

There are far more urgent needs going unaddressed in the DHS budget. For example, the President proposes to slash the Coast Guard's funding by \$75 million below last year's budget and reduce the number of uniformed personnel by more than 1,100 positions. Instead of wasting millions of taxpayer dollars on civilian trials in large American cities for the Guantanamo detainees, that \$200 million would be better spent on the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard took on an expanded homeland security mission after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. While remaining responsible for its traditional missions, including life-saving search and rescue operations, the

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Coast Guard now is also responsible for protecting our ports from a wide variety of threats, including the potential smuggling of weapons of mass destruction.

An attack on a major port would have devastating consequences, causing widespread loss of life. Because the ports are vital economic centers, an attack would also send ripple effects throughout our economy. As we look forward, it is clear that the Coast Guard's role in homeland security missions will only expand.

The extraordinary performance of Coast Guard men and women in response to the earthquake in Haiti stands as the most recent reminder of how much we need this vital service. As Commandant Allen noted in his final State of the Coast Guard Address, Coast Guard personnel are the "federal first responders for the nation." We cannot compromise the swiftness and flexibility of the Coast Guard, and we cannot afford to cut the Coast Guard's funding when we need them more than ever.

The homeland security budget also must reflect evolving threats, particularly in cyber space. As the Director of National Intelligence recently testified, "malicious cyber activity is occurring on an unprecedented scale with extraordinary sophistication." Our federal government, and the Department in particular, must greatly expand its capacity to take on this threat. Yet, the budget for the National Cyber Security Division would be reduced by \$19 million next year, a reduction that flies in the face of the growing cyber threat.

There are additional troubling cuts in the President's budget proposal. Were his budget to be enacted, the Border Patrol would be reduced by 181 agents, despite the soaring smuggling of drugs, cash, and weapons across our borders. Last year, Senator Lieberman, Senator McCain, and I included additional funding in the budget resolution for federal agents and other resources to fight smuggling by the Mexican drug cartels along the Southwest Border. We must build on that investment.

But there also is a growing problem of smuggling across our Northern Border. In December, I met with Maine's federal judges who voiced alarm about the influx of methamphetamine into the United States from Canada. I am, therefore, concerned that the number of Border Patrol agents would decrease next year for the first time if the Administration prevails.

The President's budget could also undermine our state and local partners who are often the first to respond to natural disasters and terrorist threats. The proposals to deny northern border states Operation Stonegarden funding, and to insufficiently fund the Fire Act and port

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security grant programs, could deprive first responders and local communities of the resources needed to secure our nation.

On the other side of the ledger, the proposed increases for aviation security are welcome. America was starkly reminded on Christmas Day of the vulnerabilities in our aviation security system. To address aviation security threats, the budget includes significant funding to increase the number of imaging machines, canines, behavior detection officers, and Federal Air Marshals protecting airline passengers.

Our nation's top intelligence officials recently testified that it is "certain" that al Qaeda is planning another attack against the United States within the next six months. In the face of this testimony, we must ensure that the Department's budget priorities are aligned to counter the threats we face from a determined enemy.

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