



United States Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman

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LIEBERMAN PUSHES FOR BIO-TERROR PREPAREDNESS ON SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF SENATE ANTHRAX ATTACK

WASHINGTON - Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., recalling the anthrax mailing to then Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle two years ago, reminded taxpayers Tuesday that the federal government has taken only nominal steps toward protecting the nation from bio-terror attack.

The nation still lacks effective counter measures, and emergency medical personnel lack even a tiny percentage of the funds they need to provide adequate services in the event of attack, Lieberman said.

“The catastrophic events of September 11th and the anthrax attacks that followed demonstrated that our government was ill prepared to deal with the kinds of terrorist attacks we could face in the future,” Lieberman said. “We still have no diagnostic for anthrax, no modern vaccine for anthrax, and no effective treatment for inhalation anthrax once a victim is infected. Our preparedness for smallpox is similarly weak, and we have no countermeasures for dozens of other potential bioterror pathogens. Finally, our medical first responders are not being given the resources they need to do their job properly in case of a biological attack. The bottom line is that the Bush Administration is not taking the threat of a bio terrorist attack as seriously as it should.”

Two years ago, five people nationwide died as a result of numerous mailings contaminated by anthrax - including a Connecticut resident, Otilie Lundgren. Twenty-eight people were exposed to the deadly agent on October 15, 2001, when a letter containing anthrax was opened in the Senate offices of Senator Daschle, D-S.D. None account for the casualties.

Lieberman successfully advocated emergency funding for the Postal Service to decontaminate their facilities and requested an investigation into the handling of the anthrax attacks at all affected postal facilities.

To address broader biomedical shortcomings, Lieberman and Senator Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, first introduced legislation in December 2001 that would encourage the development of countermeasures needed to protect the nation from biological attack as the bioterror threat evolves to new and different pathogens.

The bipartisan legislation has been reintroduced again and is now before the Finance Committee. President Bush’s solution - known as BioShield - is nearing Congressional approval but is a faint shadow of what is needed to develop effective vaccines and treatments. Lieberman said “at best, BioShield is a beginning. At worst, it’s a diversion.”

The Lieberman-Hatch approach would stimulate private sector development - primarily through tax incentives - of new medicines, vaccines, and antidotes to protect against biological, chemical, and radiological attacks. Currently, no

established market exists for bioterror countermeasures since antidotes will only be used in the case of a catastrophe.

The legislation provides a range of incentives to encourage companies to conduct this research at their own risk and expense, on the premise that direct government funding of this research is likely to be much more expensive to the government and less likely to produce the bioterror cures we need.

“The casualty potential of a biological attack is far greater than any other mode of terrorist attack we have seen to date and the Administration’s progress has been negligible,” Lieberman said. “We clearly are not prepared for a serious bio terror attack. And we need to undertake bold, new steps to get ready.”

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