Dated: July 21, 2004

Statement of Senator Joseph I. Lieberman on Introduction of Homeland Security Strategy Bill

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce legislation to forge a comprehensive and effective strategy for our homeland security.

Before 9/11, we did not truly perceive the threat of terrorism on our own soil, and what homeland security efforts we did have underway were badly divided. Dozens of agencies responsible for pieces of our homeland security were scattered across the federal government, and were largely unconnected to state and local officials and first responders on the front lines in our nation's cities and towns. There were wasteful overlaps and, more critically, treacherous gaps. And because everyone was responsible for parts of the effort, no one was ultimately in charge.

We took one large step to remedy these weaknesses by creating the Department of Homeland Security. The Department brings more than two dozen of the federal government's critical homeland security agencies and programs under one roof, allowing for unprecedented coordination and cooperation. It also created a Cabinet Secretary charged with managing the budgets and personnel of these agencies, and capable of providing a focal point for homeland programs and issues in the Cabinet and beyond.

But we knew that creating a better organization would mean little if we did not lay out a clear roadmap to galvanize our homeland defenses – at all levels of government and the private sector. That is what many of us called for and, regretfully, it is something this nation still sorely lacks.

The Administration did produce a "National Strategy for Homeland Security" in July 2002 that correctly identified many of the challenges we face in preparing to meet the threat of terrorism. But that document predates the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and is already out of date. More significantly, it failed to set priorities, clear deadlines and accountability for the vast array of homeland security tasks we face.

As the highly regarded Gilmore Commission on terrorism noted in its final report last December: "Much is still required in order to achieve an effective, comprehensive, unified national strategy and to translate vision into action. Notably absent is a clear prioritization for the use of scarce resources against a diffuse, unclear threat as part of the spectrum of threats – some significantly more common than terrorism. The panel has serious concern about the current state of homeland security efforts along the full spectrum from awareness to recovery, worried that efforts by the government may provide the perception of enhanced security that causes the nation to become complacent about the many critical actions still required."

While it is true that the Department of Homeland Security is proceeding with some more targeted strategies regarding specific areas of concern, these cannot replace a comprehensive strategy that sets the ultimate policies and priorities for our homeland effort.

That is why I am introducing legislation requiring a new homeland security strategy that can provide the strong, precise national guidance we need on this critical issue.

In a February 3, 2004 report, the General Accounting Office surveyed seven existing Federal strategies related to terrorism – including the National Strategy for Homeland Security – and laid out guiding principles to improve these strategies. My legislation incorporates these

principles, which stress accountability and prioritization as requirements for a new homeland security strategy. The new strategy must include a hierarchy of strategic goals and indicate the specific activities needed to achieve those goals, as well as the likely costs, and how such funds should be generated. In other words, the strategy must make real choices about priorities and resources. The current strategy identifies many goals, but rarely provides deadlines for action, standards or performance measures to assess progress, or details on the resources required for stated initiatives.

The strategy must clearly spell out organizational roles and responsibilities, including the proper roles of State, local, private and international actors and the coordinating mechanisms to bring these actors together. Almost three years after 9/11, we still too often must ask "who is in charge?" of key pieces of our homeland security agenda. And, critically, it must address how the homeland security strategy relates to other Federal strategies regarding terrorist threats, and how the strategies will be integrated.

The legislation also highlights certain substantive areas that should be addressed, such as a thoroughgoing strategy to maximize information sharing related to homeland security throughout the federal government and with state and local officials and, where appropriate, the private sector. The strategy must look at preparing the public health sector to detect and respond to terrorist attacks, at integrating military capabilities into our homeland security planning, at building all-hazards preparedness throughout all levels of government and the private sector, and securing our critical infrastructure, much of which is in private hands.

The bill would require that the strategy be written every four years, with updates every two years and annual progress reports to be submitted in conjunction with the President's annual budget request. Recognizing that many Federal agencies outside the Department of Homeland Security play a critical part in homeland security, it calls on the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security to help the Secretary construct the strategy.

Importantly, it would create an independent panel of experts to review the strategy and offer alternative proposals as appropriate – a so-called "Team B" to provide decision makers with alternative perspectives and solutions for consideration. This nonpartisan panel, to be called the Homeland Security Commission, would consist of nine members appointed by the Secretary in consultation with Congress. The members would be recognized experts in the field of homeland security and cannot be current officers or employees of the federal government. This Commission is modeled on the successful National Defense Panel, which helped guide strategic planning for our military forces. This Commission can help ensure that we marshal all the best ideas to defend our homeland and do not fall into complacent, or narrow ways of thinking about the threats we face. We know that terrorists are always adapting their strategies and techniques. We must do no less.

We meet today amid ongoing, and indeed heightened, threats of terrorist attacks on our homeland. We need not be intimidated, but we must be prepared. Only a new and more forceful national strategy will energize and organize our resources – at all levels of government and within the private sector – to meet this threat. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation to give us such a strategy.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the full text of the bill be reprinted in the record.