

Bush Budget Further Undermines Domestic Preparedness Even As New Report Reveals Dangerous Underfunding of Guard and Reserves



Huntington, NY—On Friday, U.S. Representative Steve Israel (D-NY) and New York State Deputy Secretary for Public Safety Michael Balboni outlined the impact of President Bush's budget request on state homeland security and preparedness programs and revealed figures on New York National Guard equipment and staffing levels. President Bush's draconian homeland security cuts come on the heels of a recent report finding that National Guard forces lack the equipment or training they need for the job, leaving them under-prepared to respond to natural disasters or domestic threats.

"A few weeks ago I was in Afghanistan and saw firsthand the resurgence of the Taliban," said Congressman Israel, a Member of the House Appropriations Committee that added \$690 million in funds to better equip and staff the National Guard. "It's bad enough that the Administration has distracted us with Iraq and allowed the Taliban to regroup in Afghanistan. Now, we have a report that confirms that our Guard and Reserve forces nationally are undertrained and underequipped. It's unfathomable that with these circumstances, the Administration seeks further cuts to homeland security programs on Long Island and throughout New York."

President Bush's proposed budget has severe repercussions for homeland security programs in New York. Under the proposal, national funding for state and local homeland security grant programs will be reduced from \$4.1 billion in 2008 to \$2.2 billion in 2009, a \$1.9 billion or 46% cut. The President's budget also underfunds the Army National Guard by \$3.8 billion and the Air National Guard by \$5.5 billion.

A recent report by the Commission on National Guard and Reserves found that the National Guard and Reserve is plagued by shortages of personnel and \$48 billion worth of missing equipment due to deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Approximately 600,000 reservists have

served in Iraq or Afghanistan since the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, with the use of reservists increasing more than five-fold. The report found an “appalling gap” in the military’s readiness to respond to a chemical, biological or nuclear weapons attack and concluded that 88% of the Army National Guard units are “not ready.”

Last year, Congressman Israel, Governor Spitzer and New York State Adjutant General Joseph Taluto released figures on New York National Guard equipment and staffing levels and committed to fight for more resources. While the equipment and staffing levels have improved since that time, they still remain below capacity. The New York National Guard is only funded at 64% of its full time requirements for staffing, an increase of 3% from last year. In terms of equipment capacity, the New York National Guard has 49% of the Humvees it needs (an increase of 22% from last year), 82% of cargo vehicles (an increase of 39%), 66% of communication equipment (an increase of 24%) and 75% of night vision equipment (an increase of 21%).