

Congressman Rothman: Save New Jersey's Coast Guard Safety and Security Teams from Budget Cuts

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CONTACT: Aaron Keyak

office: (202) 225-5061

cell: (202) 905-6361

email: aaron.keyak@mail.house.gov

Washington, DC – Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ), a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security, Defense, and State and Foreign Operations, sent the following letter to the chairman and the ranking member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security on April 14, 2010:

Dear Chairman Price and Ranking Member Rogers

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed elimination of five Coast Guard Marine Safety and Security Teams (MSST) in the Department of Homeland Security's Fiscal Year 2011 budget.

The MSSTs were established in response to heightened security levels after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and our national threat level has not decreased since the teams were commissioned after the attacks. It is therefore, counterintuitive that the number of these vital teams should now be decreased.

I am particularly concerned that this would include the MSST responsible for the New Jersey/ New York City region. The New York City region MSST provides air, sea and ground surveillance, and is trained to provide rapid response to a broad range of port security and harbor defense missions for the port area of Newark Liberty International Airport. It is able to perform maritime law enforcement and interdiction, support and protect U.S. and allied forces and detect weapons of mass destruction and explosives. If this MSST is decommissioned, the only teams protecting the east coast will be located in Boston and Miami.

The importance of this team for the national security interests of the United States cannot be understated. New Jersey houses the largest container port on the East Coast -- the second-largest in our country. Our proximity to New York City and potential terrorist targets such as the George Washington Bridge, Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, Port Elizabeth, Newark Airport, dozens of chemical plants and Giants Stadium, just to name a few, renders the area one of the most important points of defense against terrorism in our country. This is why a two-mile stretch in Northern New Jersey has been called the "most dangerous two miles in the United States when it comes to terrorism";

Given these facts, I strongly believe that at a time when terrorism is a serious threat to our national security, it is more important than ever to ensure that our Coast Guard has sufficient resources to protect this critical, high-risk area. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Steven R. Rothman

Member of Congress

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