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Lieberman Responds to Secretary Gates' Announcement

WASHINGTON -- Senator Joe Lieberman (ID-CT) today responded to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' announcement on the fiscal year 2010 defense budget:

"I support Secretary Gates' effort to reform the Defense Department's modernization programs." Lieberman said. "I am glad he agrees that many of our most essential defense systems are built in Connecticut. The Secretary's decision to cancel the VH-71 Presidential Replacement Helicopter is a wise one. It will create an opportunity for America's Presidents to continue to be flown in Sikorsky helicopters, the most reliable aircraft in the world. I am also glad that Secretary Gates has reaffirmed the importance of building a next generation strategic submarine force to replace our aging Ohio-class submarines and will continue to support the ongoing production of Virginia-class submarines. These boats are essential to the national security, and will continue to be so for many years to come."

"Nonetheless, I disagree with some of Secretary Gates' specific proposals. I strongly oppose his decision to halt production of the F-22 Raptor at 187 aircraft. If we stop the F-22 program now, our industrial base will suffer a major blow before the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter reaches full-rate production. This would result in the loss of thousands of jobs in Connecticut - the skilled workers we will need to support the F-35 in just a few years, but who may no longer be available. I also disagree with the Secretary's proposal to terminate the production of the C-17 Globemaster. Every combatant commander I speak to tells me that we need more of these aircraft, and I will work to make sure they stay in production."

As a senior member of the Senate Committee on Armed Services and chairman of its Subcommittee on Airland, Senator Lieberman will hold hearings through the year to assess Secretary Gates' proposals and modify them in a National Defense Authorization Act that protects our national security.