

February 10, 2004- Sanchez to DHS: Keep Your Promise, Fund First Responders

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For Immediate Release

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202-225-2965 Sanchez to DHS: Keep Your Promise, Fund First Responders

Washington, D.C. — On the heels of testimony last week assuring the reimbursement of costs incurred by first responders from the recent orange threat alert, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge yesterday reported to the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee that more than half the money allocated over the past two years to first responders to help them prepare for terrorist attacks has not yet been disbursed.

Secretary Ridge assured the committee that The Homeland Security Department (DHS) was not to blame for the delays in disbursement, but did not offer concrete plans for solving the problems at the national level.

Last week in a hearing of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, Homeland Security Deputy Secretary James Loy testified that DHS plans to reimburse first responder agencies for expenses incurred during the orange threat alert level from Dec. 21 through Jan. 9.

“We expect to pay the bills,” Loy said at a Feb. 4 Select Homeland Security Committee hearing. Loy added that the department wants to have state and local expense information in its hands by Feb. 23.

DHS wants to figure out how much money states, cities and towns spent during the orange alert. That way, the department can accurately find out how much it needs to reimburse states and localities for complying with the orange alert.

“I certainly applaud the department’s commitment to alleviate some of the financial burden placed on our local agencies,” said Rep. Sanchez, whose district qualified recently for a portion of the Urban Area Security grants. “Unfortunately, the DHS track record has not been good. The police and fire chiefs in my district have lived up to their commitments by continually raising the level of preparedness in response to security alerts. Now, the department needs to live up to its commitments by assuring that the grant dollars are delivered.”

While the state does not have money available to reimburse states and locals for overtime costs of securing critical infrastructure, California’s Office of Homeland Security is hoping that DHS’s survey of expenses will help provide “sufficient justification” for the department to provide additional money.

The state Office of Emergency Services (OES) is asking operational area coordinators to compile a report of overtime expenses incurred by county, city and special district entities during the orange alert. A template that coordinators can use is available on OES’s web site at <http://www.oes.ca.gov>, under Homeland Security. Information is due to OES by 5 p.m. Feb. 20.