

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 13, 2002

Dear Senator Stevens:

First, I apologize for the tardiness of this reply. Next, I want to thank you for your letter to Assistant to the President for Homeland Security Tom Ridge. The President and the Administration greatly appreciate the continued interest and involvement of you, the Committee on Appropriations, and the entire Congress in the critical homeland security issues facing the Nation. We share your view that it is essential for Federal, state, and local governments to work together closely as part of the significant and sustained national effort to defend the United States and the American people.

The Administration is committed to ensuring that you and the Congress receive the appropriate information you need with respect to the Administration's homeland security policies and practices. As you know, the various Executive Branch departments and agencies with responsibility for homeland security continue to provide substantial amounts of information to Congress. Executive Branch officials such as Attorney General John Ashcroft, Director Robert Mueller of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Director Joseph Allbaugh of the Federal Emergency Management Agency have regularly testified before Congress about homeland security and other issues. Director Mitch Daniels of the Office of Management and Budget has regularly testified and provided information on issues related to the budget. In addition, Governor Ridge and other Presidential advisors have met with and provided briefings on homeland security and budgetary issues to many Members of Congress and their staffs on numerous occasions over the last six months. These kinds of activities -- all of which are designed to ensure that Congress has the information it needs on homeland security policy -- will continue in the future.

In your letter, you request that Governor Ridge formally testify before your Committee. The long-standing position of Presidents of both parties, a position long respected by Congress, is that members of the President's staff do not ordinarily testify before congressional committees. This position has long applied to Presidential advisors such as the Chief of Staff, the Counsel, the National Security Advisor, and the other immediate advisors to the President such as Governor Ridge. Therefore, we respectfully must decline your invitation for Governor Ridge to formally testify before the Committee, but also wish to emphasize that Governor Ridge and others in the Executive Branch remain available to meet with you and your entire Committee. Additionally,

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Governor Ridge, White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales, and I would be happy to meet with you about this matter at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Nicholas E. Calio
Assistant to the President
for Legislative Affairs

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Identical letter sent to Chairman Robert C. Byrd