

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2006

COLLINS- LIEBERMAN INVITE DHS SECRETARY TO WORK TOGETHER ON FEMA OVERHAUL

Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) have invited the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to work with the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee as the Committee works to improve DHS' capabilities. DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff has expressed plans to "retool" the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a result of its failure to adequately prepare for and respond to Hurricane Katrina. Senators Collins and Lieberman are currently leading a Committee investigation, which includes an ongoing series of hearings, to examine the government's preparation for and response to the hurricane and aftermath. Senators Collins and Lieberman are the Chairman and Ranking Member respectively of the Committee, which has jurisdiction over DHS.

The following is the text of the Senators' letter to Secretary Chertoff:

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

We understand that you are planning soon to announce a proposal to "retool" the Federal Emergency Management Agency as a result of its failure to adequately prepare for and respond to Hurricane Katrina. As you know, we have been leading an extensive investigation into the preparedness for and response

to Hurricane Katrina and we expect the investigation to yield a number of recommendations for improving the Department of Homeland Security's capabilities. We invite you to work with us as you develop your proposal.

By the end of March, it is our intent to present the Committee with a report outlining our findings as well as detailed recommendations for improving the emergency planning and response capabilities at all levels – local, state, and federal. We expect that the report will include recommendations that require legislation and some that do not. We are examining carefully the structure of the emergency preparedness and response functions within the Department of Homeland Security as well as FEMA's role within the Department following partial execution of your Second Stage Review. We are similarly examining the Stafford Act, other federal laws concerning emergency preparedness and response, and relevant Homeland Security Presidential Directives to determine whether they provide the framework necessary for the Department to operate at peak effectiveness.

This we provide as background because we believe that the Committee's investigation and report combined with the results of the Department's "lessons learned" process and the Homeland Security Council's internal review can amount to a powerful catalyst for informed, positive change. That is why we invite you to work with us to achieve a consensus agenda for retooling the Department to better respond to the next catastrophe. If we produce separate agendas, we risk conflict and a fragmented approach. But if we work together, our chances of achieving success multiply.

Please let us know if, as we have proposed, you are interested in working together to address the shortcomings exposed by Hurricane Katrina. Thank you for your attention to these important matters.