

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2006

# FINAL HURRICANE KATRINA HEARING FOCUSES ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

Chairman Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) today held the final hearing as part of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's investigation to examine the government's preparations for and response to Hurricane Katrina. The hearing was the 21st in a series of hearings over the past six months that included 74 witnesses from all levels of federal, state, and local government. As part of the investigation, the committee also conducted 300 interviews and reviewed some 820,000 pages of documents. Today's hearing focused on recommendations for reform and included testimony from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Department of Homeland Security Inspector General's (DHS IG) Office, and other homeland security and emergency response experts.

"Our purpose and our obligation now is to move forward to create an emergency preparedness and response structure that brings immediate improvement and that guarantees continual progress. This will not be done by simply renaming agencies or drawing new organizational charts. We are not here to rearrange the deck chairs on a ship that, while perhaps not sinking, certainly is adrift," said Senator Collins. "This new structure must be based on a clear understanding of the roles and capabilities of all emergency management agencies. It must establish a strong chain of command that encourages, empowers, and trusts front-line decision-making. It must replace ponderous, rigid bureaucracy with discipline, agility, cooperation, and collaboration. It must build a stronger partnership among all levels of government with the responsibilities of each partner clearly defined, and it must hold them accountable when those responsibilities are not met."

"From knowledge and information will come change," Senator Lieberman said. "Out of this catastrophe, which has been followed by a painfully slow and flawed recovery, we have a chance to create a new system of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response

and recovery that learns from those agencies that worked well, like the Coast Guard, while reforming those that did not, most notably FEMA.”

The witnesses who testified at today’s hearing were: The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, U.S. Senator; The Honorable David M. Walker, Comptroller General, U.S. Government Accountability Office; Richard L. Skinner, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Bruce P. Baughman, President, National Emergency Management Association, Director, Alabama State Emergency Management Agency; Frank J. Cilluffo, Associate Vice President for Homeland Security, Director, Homeland Security Policy Institute, The George Washington University; Herman B. Leonard, Ph.D., Professor of Public Management, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School, Harvard University.

The GAO, during today’s hearing, released a preliminary report of observations and recommendations based on a separate review of the government’s handling of Hurricane Katrina. The GAO’s recommendations included clarifying the roles and responsibilities of key federal officials, clarifying various aspects of the National Response Plan, and strengthening planning and response capabilities.

Senators Collins and Lieberman expect to release a committee report on their investigation later this month.