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HOUSE-SENATE NEGOTIATORS REACH AGREEMENT ON DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL THAT INCLUDES COLLINS-LIEBERMAN CONTRACTING REFORM PROVISIONS

House and Senate negotiators have reached agreement on the fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, which includes key provisions of government-wide contracting reform provisions authored by Homeland Security Committee Ranking Member Susan Collins (R-ME) and Chairman Joe Lieberman (ID-CT). The provisions will strengthen competition in federal contracting, add transparency to the process, and help curtail waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' money. The provisions will also help improve the federal acquisition workforce—a critical component of effective and efficient federal contracting.

Senator Collins said, "Federal contract purchases now exceed $400 billion a year, and the amount of waste that has been uncovered through our committee's investigations is alarming. Our recent investigations into Iraq contracting and contracts related to Hurricane Katrina, for example, highlighted the need for major contracting reform to bring more accountability and transparency to the process. I am particularly pleased that important reforms to the federal acquisition workforce were also included in this legislation."

The Collins-Lieberman provisions in the defense authorization bill will reform the manner in which the government awards large contracts. Highlights of these provisions are as follows:

The bill includes much-needed provisions authored by Senators Collins and Lieberman to enable the federal government to make more informed contracting decisions by ensuring that each agency has well trained personnel to handle contracting issues. Specifically, the bill:

• Creates a new executive branch Czar called the Assistant Administrator for Acquisition Workforce Programs

• It creates enhanced Acquisition and Contracting Training Programs

• It establishes Government-wide Policies and Evaluations

• It creates clearly-defined roles and responsibilities for Chief Acquisition Officers

• It establishes Acquisition and Contracting Training Reporting procedures

• It creates a first-ever Acquisition Workforce Human Capital Succession Plan

• It establishes Training in the Acquisition of Architect and Engineering Services, and:

• It encourages innovative techniques to retain and recruit acquisition professionals

• The bill requires the head of government agencies to determine if it is necessary for an agency to award
a single award indefinite delivery indefinite quantity contract valuing over a $100 million.

• It requires that agencies price services in indefinite delivery indefinite quantity contracts in advance

• It requires an agency to notify Congress 30 days prior to awarding a single award indefinite delivery indefinite quantity contract over a hundred million dollars
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• It requires the publication of a justification and approval for conducting a sole source contract or task and delivery order.

• It provides a process for a contractor to protest the decision of an agency to award a task or delivery order over $10 million dollars under an indefinite delivery indefinite quantity contract to a competing contractor.

The Collins-Lieberman "Accountability in Government Contracting Act of 2007," S. 680, was approved unanimously by the Senate last month. While many provisions of this bill were included in the defense authorization bill, Senators Collins and Lieberman will continue to press for approval of their legislation in the U.S. House.