WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2005

LIEBERMAN STATEMENT ON SEVENTH KATRINA HEARING

WASHINGTON – Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., Wednesday, delivered the following statement at the Committee's seventh hearing on preparations for and response to Hurricane Katrina:

Madam Chairman, thanks for holding this seventh hearing in the Committee's ongoing investigation into the preparations for and response to Hurricane Katrina. Today, we temporarily turn away from examining the role of federal, state, and local agencies and focus instead on the role of private sector agencies and what government might learn from companies that were prepared and uniquely positioned to help save lives in emergencies – companies like those represented before us today. In some areas hit by the storm, stores like Wal Mart, Target, and Home Depot were virtual life lines for dazed and bereft citizens who were fortunate enough to survive Katrina's wrath. These companies and their employees became key distribution points for food, water, clothing, generators, and other supplies because they were prepared and because they had the capacity to do what they do everyday, and that is to move goods and provide services. Mississippi Power, a subsidiary of Southern Company, was able to restore life-sustaining electricity to hundreds of thousands of customers well ahead of schedule apparently because it has a culture of empowering managers to make decisions free from authorization requirements and other bureaucratic entanglements. Starwood Hotels, which operates three properties, including the Sheraton in New Orleans, provided vital services to its customers, employees, and first responders during and immediately after the storm, and was able to get its hotels back up and operating, within days after the storm. And IBM, one of the world's leading information technology companies, has much to teach us in terms of how to harness technology to plan, manage, share information and coordinate disaster-related activities better than the

government did in response to Hurricane Katrina. We examine these stories today to learn lessons that will help all businesses – large and small – as well as all levels of government, be better prepared to respond when disaster strikes. Since 9/11, we have been all too aware of the fact that the private sector owns 85 percent of our nation's critical infrastructure – that is, our communications networks, power grids, financial and health services, chemical plants, oil refineries, transportation systems and much more. These infrastructures form the backbone of our society and economy and, therefore, must be prepared, in the national interest, to respond. That's why we created an Infrastructure Protection division in the Department of Homeland Security which was the first of its kind at any federal agency. The point was that government needed to work with the private sector to make sure the systems so crucial to our way of life were adequately protected, and if attacked by terrorists or overwhelmed by natural forces, were able to recover quickly and restore services. Among the lessons reinforced by our examination today is that there is no substitute for preparation. We also learned that leadership is key, as are communications,, and that in a crisis decisions must often be made by those on the scene. We also learned that the homeland security partnership between government and the private sector must be improved. In the final analysis, when the lives of American people are at stake – whether from terror or natural disaster – we must transcend all affiliations and unite as a team, as you did, using all of the strengths of our great country – whether they are from the public, private or non-profit sectors. We have to operate as one to get the job done. You did that. I hope this hearing will prepare our country to achieve that sense of unity of purpose, get closer to where we need to be. Thank you Madam Chairman.