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# **SENATOR COLLINS QUESTIONS DHS & FEMA LEADERS ON READINESS TO RESPOND TO MAN- MADE AND NATURAL DISASTERS**

Senator Susan Collins today will question top officials from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on the progress the agencies have made to improve the country's readiness to respond to both man-made and natural disasters. The hearing is part of the Senate Homeland Security Committee's continuing oversight of DHS and FEMA, particularly focusing on the reforms that were required by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act. Senators Collins and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) authored the FEMA reform bill that was signed into law in October. Their legislation followed the Committee's investigation into and report on the government's flawed response to Hurricane Katrina, which included 24 hearings, interviews with 400 people, and the review of 838,000 pages of documents.

“While memories of Hurricane Katrina and the approaching Atlantic-hurricane season provide the impetus for this timely hearing, we must not forget that the purpose of our reform efforts was broader than the response to hurricanes, or even to natural disasters in general,” said Senator Collins. “Our legislation explicitly defined FEMA’s mission as all-hazards, whether natural or man-made, and invoked the full panoply of emergency-management functions – preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation.”

DHS Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson and FEMA Administrator David Paulison are scheduled to testify at today’s hearing. At Senator Collins’ invitation, Administrator Paulison last month traveled to Maine to tour damage from the Patriot’s Day storm. Following the tour, FEMA approved the state’s request for federal disaster assistance for 13 Maine counties impacted by the storm.

“While FEMA’s effective response to the recent tornados in the Midwest and to the April nor’easter in Maine is encouraging, and while they were certainly devastating to the many communities that were struck, obviously neither disaster approached the scope of Hurricane Katrina,” said Senator Collins. “To this day, residents of the Gulf Coast still point to a cumbersome bureaucracy that hinders the delivery of aid and reconstruction assistance. FEMA’s reorganization is not yet complete and coordination with other federal partners is still a work in progress.”

“Our nation is regularly challenged by fires, floods, tornados, earthquakes, and by the threat of terrorist attacks. So when we ask whether FEMA is prepared for the 2007 hurricane season, we are really posing a question that represents a broader and deeper set of concerns,” said Senator Collins.

Earlier this month, Senator Collins attended a hurricane readiness exercise conducted by FEMA in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. She praised FEMA for increasing its regional focus and improving cooperation with state officials, as required by the Collins-Lieberman FEMA reform bill.