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WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009

FINAL WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT: FEMA STAYS IN DHS

WASHINGTON – Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., and Ranking Member Susan Collins, R-Me., thanked President Obama Tuesday for putting a long simmering question about the fate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to rest. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced that this Administration has no intention of removing FEMA from DHS.

Following its dismal response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, FEMA has been under fire from critics who threatened to try to strip it out of DHS and re-establish it as a stand-alone agency. Before the creation of DHS in 2003, FEMA was an independent agency. Although praised for its performance throughout much of the 1990's, FEMA suffered criticism for its handling of Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and never had the capacity to address a catastrophic event like Katrina.

“FEMA is exactly where it belongs,” Lieberman said. “When the Department of Homeland Security was created in 2002, FEMA was intended to be at the core of this new, unified focus on protecting Americans where they live and work. Hurricane Katrina exposed FEMA’s weaknesses, but when Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act in 2006, FEMA began building itself into a stronger, more accountable agency with a renewed sense of mission, greater stature, and more resources.

“Today’s FEMA is not the same agency it was in 2005. Rather than splintering apart agencies that work together well now, the President has wisely chosen to allow FEMA to rebuild itself into the best disaster preparedness and response agency in the world.”

Collins said: “As we have seen from its response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the California wildfires, flooding in the Midwest, and winter storms in Maine, FEMA has made a great deal of progress since passage of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act that Senator Lieberman and I authored,” said Sen. Collins. “Keeping FEMA within DHS improves efforts to reform our nation’s emergency response system, allows for better coordination among agencies, facilitates partnerships among emergency responders, and advances an all-hazards approach.

The Administration’s recognition of the need to keep FEMA at DHS, which Sen. Lieberman and I have long supported, will allow the Department to better focus on preparing for the next emergency.”