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HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE HOLDS KATRINA HEARING TO EXPLORE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR

WASHINGTON, DC— Chairman Susan Collins and Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman today held a hearing exploring the effective actions taken by the private sector before, during, and in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and what federal, state, and local governments can learn from the private sector's actions. The hearing was titled, "Hurricane Katrina: What Can Government Learn from the Private Sector's Response?" This was the seventh hearing as part of the investigation into the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina.

The committee heard testimony from David M. Ratcliffe, President and Chief Executive Officer of Southern Company; Stanley S. Litow, Vice President for Corporate Community Relations and President for the IBM International Foundation at IBM Corporation; Kevin T. Regan, Regional Vice President for Hotel Operations at Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Inc.; and Jason F. Jackson, Director of Business Continuity of the Global Security Division at Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Witnesses testified that they were able to maintain critical communication systems in the aftermath of the hurricane, whereas government agencies at all levels were unable to do so. They were also able to provide immediate, vital services and supplies to hurricane victims in the Gulf Coast region.

“In the first hours and days after Katrina struck, drinking water, food, and other vital supplies poured into the devastated cities and towns of the Gulf Coast. Building materials, tools, generators, and trained personnel were brought to the front lines of the disaster to provide shelter, to reopen roads, and to restore essential services. This remarkable performance was the result of individual efforts by businesses large and small, efforts that were not directed by a central command, but by a common purpose. As government was breaking down, business was stepping up,” Senator Collins said.

“The outpouring of generosity, the demonstration of competence, and the unleashing of initiative by Americans – whether individuals or businesses – have been the bright spots in a story that has, in far too many other ways, been discouraging. The quick and efficient delivery of private sector relief to Katrina’s victims was not, however, a matter of luck. It was the result of planning, preparation and action. We have much to learn from the private sector, and we must do all we can to apply those lessons to government,” Senator Collins added.

Senator Lieberman added, “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, 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. I hope this hearing prepares our country to achieve that sense of unity of purpose to get closer to where we need to be.”