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# LIEBERMAN, COLLINS, LANDRIEU MARK KATRINA ANNIVERSARY

WASHINGTON—Senate leaders marked the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina’s landfall Friday by issuing the following statements and a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on recovery efforts and called on the Administration to continue its mission to ensure the nation is prepared to deal with the repercussions of future disasters.

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., Ranking Member Susan Collins, R-Me., and Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery Chairman Mary Landrieu, D-La., led the effort to reform the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) after its disastrous response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The Senators have continued to oversee Gulf Coast recovery efforts since.

“Five years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, too many families along the Gulf Coast are still struggling to recover,” **Lieberman** said. “FEMA has made tremendous progress since 2005 and is evolving into a competent, professional emergency

management organization. I, along with Senators Collins and Landrieu, have pressed FEMA to continue moving forward to ensure that our nation is capable of helping survivors recover from disasters.

“FEMA must improve its preparedness to assist in future recoveries after a large-scale disaster. For example, it has yet to complete the National Disaster Recovery Framework, which is essential to providing the kinds of support for recovery our citizens need and deserve.

“The simple fact is that the distress that continues to plague many displaced Gulf Coast families—from causes both natural and man-made—spotlights the imperative to have world-class recovery systems in place so that government, on all levels, as well as individual citizens, are ready to help their communities recover from catastrophic disaster. FEMA and DHS must continue to be leaders in this effort and build on the progress made since 2005.”

Said **Collins**: “Five years ago, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast with devastating fury. When it was over, the hurricane had caused more than 1,800 deaths and some \$110 billion in damages, making it the costliest hurricane in U.S. history. All told, seven states and more than 15 million people were affected by its onslaught.

“In the days following the monster hurricane’s swath of destruction, it became clear that our nation had been woefully unprepared for a disaster of such an historic magnitude,” she said. “Along with Senator Joe Lieberman, I led the Senate Homeland Security Committee’s in-depth investigation to examine what went wrong with the government’s preparedness and emergency response at all levels: federal, state, and local. Our committee conducted 24 hearings, interviewed more than 400 people, and examined more than 838,000 pages of documents. That investigation led to publication of a seminal 732-page report, ‘Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared,’ in which the Committee detailed its extensive findings and set forth the often inexcusable failures of leadership by local, state, and federal officials. Our Senate investigation documented massive systemic problems, such as communications systems that prevented emergency responders from talking to one another and confusion over who was responsible for what at all levels of government.

“Based on those investigatory hearings, Senator Lieberman and I authored and passed legislation, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, to strengthen our nation’s capacity to respond to natural disasters and to terrorist attacks. Our legislation overhauled FEMA so that it is better equipped to handle such disasters with urgency and agility.

“As a result, today’s FEMA is far better prepared than it was in 2005. With changes and reforms spurred by our legislation and new leadership, FEMA is now a much stronger and more accountable agency, coordinating its efforts more effectively with state and local governments and forming vital partnerships with first-responders. In the five years since Katrina, we have seen steady progress and increased preparedness when it comes to responding to emergencies, including floods in Tennessee and wildfires in California,” said Collins. “In Maine, FEMA helped mightily with recovery efforts from severe storms and flooding that have hit the state in recent years, including this past spring. The result today is that our nation is far better prepared and equipped to respond quickly and effectively a wide array of emergencies.”

“My colleagues and I have worked hard to build a safer, stronger and smarter FEMA that works in partnership with state and local governments,” said **Landrieu**. “This improved approach will help communities rebuild more efficiently and effectively following a major disaster. We are committed to not only correcting the failures from the response, but also the failings during the recovery so that our nation is fully prepared for the next catastrophe.”

In 2005 and 2006, the Committee investigated the failed response at all levels of government to Hurricane Katrina and issued the definitive report, “*Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared* (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/creports/katrinanation.html>)” in April 2006. At the federal level, the Committee found that both the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA were unprepared for catastrophic disasters. The Committee recommended replacing FEMA with a new, stronger, more robust federal response agency capable of working in a more coordinated manner with state, local, and tribal governments to prepare for future disasters. As a result of the Committee’s work, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act of 2006, which President Bush signed into law in October 2006.

The Post-Katrina Act created a new FEMA with responsibilities, missions, capabilities, and resources far exceeding those existing when Hurricane Katrina made landfall. The Act requires the FEMA Administrator have emergency management and homeland security experience, gives FEMA greater autonomy and responsibilities, and gives the Administrator the role of principal advisor to the President on emergency management.

Since the landfall of Hurricane Katrina, the Committee and Landrieu’s Disaster Recovery subcommittee have held dozens of hearings and taken other steps to track, oversee, and expedite the progress of the Gulf Coast recovery.

The GAO report – *“Hurricane Recovery: Federal Government Provided a Range of Assistance to Nonprofits following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (GAO-10-800),”* – is the last in a series Lieberman and Landrieu requested to track recovery progress after the 2005 hurricanes. The latest report examines the work conducted by FEMA and the Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding with nonprofit organizations to facilitate rebuilding efforts.

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