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# **SENATORS COLLINS AND LIEBERMAN LAUNCH OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATION OF HURRICANE RELIEF EFFORTS, EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TO LEARN LESSONS FOR FUTURE DISASTERS**

WASHINGTON, DC– Senators Susan Collins and Joseph Lieberman, Chairman and Ranking Member respectively of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, announced today that their Committee will conduct an oversight investigation of the preparation for, and response to Hurricane Katrina. The initial focus of the oversight investigation will be to ensure that the federal government is doing all it can to help the victims of this terrible tragedy. Senators Collins and Lieberman will hold hearings on the problems with preparedness and response to the hurricane and other natural and man-made disasters once emergency efforts have brought the situation under adequate control.

The Senators have scheduled an initial briefing by DHS officials for Committee Members and Senators from affected states on Wednesday, September 7th. The briefing will be closed to the media, but the Senators will schedule a press availability after the briefing.

Senators Collins and Lieberman, both of whom have had ongoing discussions with DHS and FEMA officials since Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, have released this statement:

“We are saddened and horrified by the pain, suffering, and human tragedy caused by the worst natural disaster in American history. Rescuers and relief workers are dealing with 90,000 square miles in the Gulf Coast of flooding and total devastation. Entire communities have been destroyed, families have lost loved ones and been torn apart, and the economy has been brought to its knees.

“As the Chairman and Ranking Member of the committee with jurisdiction over FEMA, it is our duty to ensure that the Executive Branch has all the resources and authorities it needs to coordinate and respond to this catastrophe. We will work with FEMA and other agencies to identify what additional support and resources they might need during this terrible time.

“It is also our responsibility to investigate the lack of preparedness and inadequate response to this terrible storm. While it is too early to reach conclusions on the response of government to this catastrophe, it is increasingly clear that serious shortcomings in preparedness and response have hampered relief efforts at a critical time.

“As President Bush made clear yesterday, the federal government’s priorities must be these: first, save lives; second, sustain lives by ensuring the necessary supplies of food, water, shelter, and medical supplies; and third, execute a comprehensive recovery effort.

“It is critical that we in the Senate do everything in our power to strengthen the federal government’s response, and that we thoroughly examine what appears to be breakdowns in preparedness for and responses to disasters, without interfering with efforts that are currently underway. We intend to demand answers as to how this immense failure occurred, but our immediate focus must and will be on what Congress can do to help the rescue and emergency operations that are ongoing.”

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