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SENATORS COLLINS, LIEBERMAN SAY EMERGENCY RESPONSE MUST BE PART OF DHS

Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, today released the following statement in reaction to a proposal by Representatives Tom Davis and Bill Shuster to move the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) out of the Department of Homeland Security.

“FEMA is not now and never has been prepared for a catastrophe the size and scope of Hurricane Katrina. Removing it from the Department of Homeland Security will not change that fact and will only further weaken, and leave isolated, an agency that does not have the resources, authority, and leadership to do its job effectively. “The seven-month, bipartisan, Senate committee investigation on the preparations for and response to Hurricane Katrina was the most comprehensive study to date. From the facts gathered through 22 hearings, 838,000 pages of documents, and 325 formal interviews, we are recommending a new organization, far stronger than FEMA, to give the federal government’s emergency managers the stature, resources, and leadership they need. Our proposed National Preparedness and Response Authority combine the resources and authorities of FEMA with Department preparedness assets, including billions of dollars of grants to states and localities and infrastructure

protection and communications functions. It would be responsible not just for disaster response, but for disaster preparedness as well, working hand in hand with state and local officials, other federal agencies, and the private and non-profit sectors to be ready for true catastrophes, whether natural or terrorist.

“Removing FEMA from DHS would needlessly sever its ties with key Department assets such as the Coast Guard, law enforcement officers, and communications capabilities, and create confusion for state and local officials who rely on DHS for support. If FEMA were removed from DHS, the Department would have to create its own, internal “FEMA” to deal with terror attacks, duplicating functions that already exist. The function of emergency response needs to be in DHS for the same reason that emergency rooms belong in hospitals – to ensure that all the relevant resources of the broader organization can be quickly and efficiently brought to bear in emergencies.” ###