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SENATOR COLLINS DELIVERS LEAD TESTIMONY AT FIRST HEARING OF COMMISSION ON WARTIME CONTRACTING

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Susan Collins, Ranking Member of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, today provided the opening testimony at the first hearing held by the congressionally-mandated Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan (CWC). During her testimony, Senator Collins commended the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) for uncovering millions in fraud, waste, and abuse in Iraq reconstruction projects while highlight problems in wartime contracting and the reforms needed to improve the process.

“Ensuring the best value for the American taxpayer in government procurements is important under the best circumstances. But it is absolutely crucial when our nation is at war and takes on reconstruction contracts such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the Commission begins its examination of this topic, I commend the work of the SIGIR. The SIGIR’s audits of reconstruction contracts in Iraq have uncovered millions in fraud, waste, and abuse. The

SIGIR's latest comprehensive report, 'Hard Lessons,' reviews the Iraq reconstruction experience from mid-2002 through fall of 2008. It is a tough, no-holds-barred report that will provide tremendous insight," said Senator Collins.

Through January 30, 2009, the SIGIR's work has led to savings of more than \$338 million for the American taxpayer. The SIGIR's investigations have resulted in 20 arrests, 19 indictments, 14 convictions, 101 suspensions, 69 proposed debarments, and 41 final debarment actions. In addition, the SIGIR today released the report, "Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience," a comprehensive report of five years of investigations of Iraq reconstruction projects.

"Whether in the United States or in a wartime environment overseas, our nation must revitalize its acquisition workforce. We are facing a crisis in our federal contracting workforce," said Sen. Collins. "The federal government has entered the 21st Century with 22 percent fewer federal civilian acquisition personnel than it had at the start of the 1990s. Moreover, as early as 2012, 50 percent of the entire federal acquisition workforce will be eligible to retire. This means that as our contract spending continues to increase dramatically, our contracting workforce continues to shrink. This gap between the work to be done and the staff to do it is eerily reminiscent of the workforce challenges our government faces in Iraq.

Senator Collins was invited to deliver the opening testimony because of her efforts in the Senate to reform federal contracting. These reforms were based on her extensive oversight of contracting waste, fraud, and abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan, in disaster recovery following Hurricane Katrina, and in other government procurements. She supported the creation and worked to expand the authority of the SIGIR. In addition, Senator Collins joined with Senator Lieberman introducing legislation signed into law that would strengthen competition in federal contracting, help rebuild the government's long-neglected acquisition workforce, and increase accountability and transparency to protect taxpayer dollars.

"This Commission's work will help us learn important lessons about our government's procurement practices," said Senator Collins. "Its findings and recommendations are vital, because, in the simplest of terms, how well we execute wartime contracting helps determine how well we build the peace."

The CWC was created as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 to investigate, report, and make recommendations on federal contracting process during wartime. Senators Jim Webb and Claire McCaskill also made remarks with SIGIR Stuart Bowen among the witnesses. Sen.

McCaskill stated, “I thank Susan Collins for being such a soldier for appropriate contracting practices in the government. She has been laboring in these fields long before Senator Webb and I arrived. And she should get appropriate recognition for her yeoman’s work in this area.”

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