

THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2006

SENATE AND HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEES STRESS IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING FEMA CAPABILITIES WITHIN DHS

Homeland Security Committee Chairman Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ranking Committee Member Joe Lieberman (D-CT) held a press conference today to stress the importance of keeping FEMA or the proposed National Preparedness Response Authority within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Senators were joined by House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Peter King (R-NY), Ranking Member Bennie Thompson (D-MS), Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee Chairman David Reichert (R-WA), Ranking Members Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), Bob Etheridge (D-NC); and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX) who share the same belief.

The Members spoke about the importance of bringing preparedness functions back into FEMA and keeping FEMA part of the Department of Homeland Security. House members announced legislation that is similar to some of the

recommendations made in the Senate Homeland Security Hurricane Katrina report entitled, "Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared."

"Members of both parties from both houses of Congress agree on two points about the future of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. First, we agree that FEMA's woefully inadequate performance to Hurricane Katrina and to other disasters requires that it be strengthened, given new authorities, stature, and leadership. We also agree that calls to remove FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security are mistaken. Our extensive report concluded that FEMA has never been prepared for a catastrophe the scale of Katrina. The evidence we developed overwhelmingly supports this conclusion," said Senator Collins.

Senator Lieberman said, "It is a powerful statement that a bipartisan, bicameral group of us agree FEMA needs to be rebuilt into a more powerful, better-managed, better integrated organization to prepare for, respond to, and help people and communities recover from both natural disasters and terrorist attacks. We also concur that, no matter what you call it, this more muscular organization must be the core of the Department of Homeland Security – as FEMA was originally intended to be and as the Hart-Rudman Commission had envisioned it."

The Senate Homeland Security Committee recently adopted findings and recommendations developed by Senators Collins and Lieberman aimed at ensuring that we are better prepared in the event of another catastrophe on the scale of Hurricane Katrina. The 86 Committee-approved recommendations include reorganizing our federal emergency management structure that would strengthen and give new authorities, stature and leadership to a new agency entitled the National Preparedness Response Authority under the umbrella of DHS. Senators Collins and Lieberman are working to introduce legislation to implement some of the report's recommendations.