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HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HOLDS KATRINA HEARING TO EXAMINE COAST GUARD RESPONSE

WASHINGTON, DC— Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Susan Collins and Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman today held the committee's sixth hearing as part of its investigation into the government's preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina. The hearing, titled, "Always Ready: The Coast Guard Response to Hurricane Katrina," examined why the Coast Guard's response efforts were so successful and whether the agencies procedures could be adopted by other agencies across all levels of government.

The committee heard testimony from Rear Admiral Robert F. Duncan, Commander Eighth Coast Guard District U.S. Coast Guard; Captain Frank M. Paskewich, Commander Coast Guard Sector New Orleans; and Captain Bruce C. Jones, Commanding Officer Coast Guard Air Station New Orleans, all of whom were involved in rescue and recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast following the hurricane.

The Coast Guard was responsible for rescuing over 33,500 people in the Gulf Coast, without any serious injuries to anyone involved. In addition, these rescues were carried out despite the fact that many Coast Guard personnel in the region had lost their own homes. 70 percent of those based in the region were initially displaced.

The witnesses explained that the Coast Guard's multi-mission capabilities and its culture enables its personnel to quickly and effectively carry out a variety of rescue and recovery operations. In particular, the Coast Guard's focus on readiness, exhibited in its cycle of planning, exercising, training and continually improving its plans, empowers its people to quickly execute in response to a crisis.

"Amidst a sea of failures across all levels of government, the Coast Guard stands as a shining example of a mission accomplished through careful planning and outstanding execution. We must learn from the failures this investigation has revealed, but we must also learn from the success," said Senator Collins. She added, "The Coast Guard's extraordinary performance provides models for other agencies at all levels of government to emulate."

"The Coast Guard performed the way I wish all government agencies had performed – with speed, courage, resourcefulness and efficiency," Senator Lieberman said. "It is a model for the rest of government, and I hope other agencies will learn from its achievements."