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LIEBERMAN SAYS DISASTER AID ABUSE UNDERSCORES NEED FOR A REINVENTED FEMA

WASHINGTON – Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., said Wednesday the widespread abuse of FEMA disaster aid confirms the need to reinvent the agency into a strongly-led, more accountable organization and underscores the Bush Administration’s historic neglect of financial oversight. Following is his full statement:

“The revelations that over \$1 billion in hurricane disaster aid were misspent confirm what I and my colleague Senator Susan Collins have been arguing for months now: FEMA needs to be reinvented as a disaster agency capable of handling a catastrophe the size and scope of Hurricane Katrina. FEMA simply was not designed to effectively or efficiently address the needs of over a million victims. We need to reinvent emergency management in this country so the next time a catastrophe occurs, it can respond to the needs of millions of victims. “These types of abuses, however, could have been and should have been predicted. Last year, a Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee investigation into FEMA’s response to the 2004 hurricane season found fraudulent claims, wasteful spending, and ineffective management following Hurricane Frances in Miami-Dade County, Fla. FEMA distributed over \$31 million to people in Miami-Dade County, even though the county’s emergency officials found damage and debris to be minimal. “Why didn’t the Administration

put proper controls in place after the 2004 hurricane season and before the 2005 season? Perhaps it was because the Bush White House has proven itself to be indifferent to financial oversight, most glaringly with the billions of dollars spent on Iraqi reconstruction that has resulted in extensive waste and fraud. “The critical nature of disaster assistance makes reports of waste, mismanagement and outright fraud extremely disturbing. We cannot sweep such allegations under the rug; we must face them head-on to preserve public confidence in these programs.”