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LIEBERMAN AND COLLINS PRAISE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO HURRICANE GUSTAV

WASHINGTON, DC– Homeland Security Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman and Ranking Member Susan Collins, who led the investigation into the government's failed response to Hurricane Katrina, have issued a statement about the government's handling of Hurricane Gustav, which hit the Gulf Coast yesterday. In 2005 and 2006, the Senators conducted an extensive investigation that resulted in 24 hearings, interviews of more than 300 witnesses, and the review of more than 838,000 pages of documents. Upon completion of the investigation, the Senators issued a comprehensive report and authored a new law to strengthen FEMA, which included many of the reforms that have helped FEMA better prepare for Gustav and other disasters.

Senator Lieberman said, "It seems clear that all levels of government – federal, state, and local – and key agencies, especially FEMA, have learned important lessons from Hurricane Katrina, and those lessons have helped save lives. Many dedicated employees from FEMA, the Coast Guard and other agencies have been working hard to help the region prepare, and that work has paid off. The evacuation before the storm was only possible because of the kind of planning and coordination that was not possible before Congress put post–Katrina reforms into place. Nevertheless, the region still faces tremendous

challenges before people can return home, and the still unmet challenges of recovering from Katrina and Rita, like finding permanent housing for thousands of families, remain and will now be even more daunting to meet."

Senator Collins said, "Hurricane Gustav was the first real test of the reforms that Senator Lieberman and I authored and of the strong new leadership at FEMA. We are seeing today a completely different FEMA from the agency that failed to respond to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. While it is still early, all indications thus far are that FEMA, under the leadership of Administrator David Paulison, has done an exceptional job at preparing for Hurricane Gustav. The agency has worked effectively with other agencies at all levels of government in coordinating the response, and it prepositioned adequate supplies and trained personnel needed to help with pre and post-hurricane activities. I am particularly pleased to see that far better planning resulted in the prompt evacuation of vulnerable individuals in hospitals and nursing homes, who tragically and inexcusably were among the victims of Hurricane Katrina."

Among the reforms included in the Collins-Lieberman legislation are the requirement that FEMA be led by an Administrator with emergency management experience; better coordination between the Department of Defense and FEMA; the requirement that FEMA assist states with developing evacuation plans; and the requirement that FEMA take into account those with disabilities, children and the elderly when developing preparedness activities.