

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2005

COLLINS, LIEBERMAN URGE SENATE LEADERSHIP TO CONSIDER KATRINA-RELATED BILLS TO PREVENT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Joe Lieberman (D-CT), Chairman and Ranking Member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, today joined a bipartisan group of their colleagues who are calling on Senate leaders to take swift action on two Katrina-related bills. The bills, already reported by the committee, would increase oversight and protect taxpayers against fraud, waste, and abuse. Collins and Lieberman, along with Senators Coburn and Carper, have written a letter to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and Democratic Leader Harry Reid urging immediate action. Following is the text of the letter:

Dear Majority Leader Frist and Democratic Leader Reid: It has become increasingly evident that federal efforts to respond to the effects of Hurricane Katrina are vulnerable to widespread abuse and waste. Reports abound of questionable contracting, unused and wasted resources, misallocated assets,

and crippling confusion. These reports have shaken public confidence in FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security and other federal relief agencies. We feel that it is critical for the Senate to take prompt action to reestablish the integrity of the relief effort and restore public confidence. To that end, we believe that the Senate should take up two bills that have been reported by the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. The Special Inspector General for Relief and Reconstruction Act (S. 1738) would provide for objective and independent audits and investigations of all federal relief programs responding to Hurricane Katrina. It would improve coordination in the work of the multiple existing Inspector General offices within the agencies participating in relief and reconstruction, thus avoiding duplication of effort and ensuring aggressive oversight. The Oversight of Vital Emergency Recovery Spending Enhancement and Enforcement Act (S. 1700) would establish a Chief Financial Officer to oversee all federal expenditures in the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. It would establish controls at the front end as well as ensure thorough accounting and oversight of the billions of dollars the Congress has appropriated, and the billions more that are likely to be appropriated. Both of these bills were reported out of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on September 27, 2005, and are on the legislative calendar awaiting action. Every day we delay, the Katrina relief effort grows even more susceptible to waste, fraud and abuse. We need to ensure that every taxpayer dollar is accounted for, and establish controls to protect the taxpayers investment. None of this can happen until the integrity of the relief effort is restored. We ask you to schedule these two bills for action by the full Senate as soon as possible.