

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2006

SECRETARY CHERTOFF TESTIFIES ABOUT DHS FAILURES IN RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Michael Chertoff, today testified at a hearing of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Committee Chairman Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) held today's hearing to examine the Department's actions in dealing with Hurricane Katrina.

The Senators pointed out that the mission statement of DHS includes, "preparing for natural disasters and terrorist attacks through planning, technology, and coordinated efforts. In the event of a natural or man-made disaster, DHS will be the first federal department to utilize a full range of state, local, and private partnerships to alleviate the effects of a potential disaster." The hearing focused on problems such as the federal government's lack of preparedness for Hurricane Katrina, inadequate leadership by DHS and FEMA officials, poor communications and situational awareness, and delays in the delivery of appropriate emergency aid and supplies to victims.

"The federal department that was supposed to lead, direct, and coordinate the federal response to Katrina was, time and again, late, uncertain, and ineffective," said Senator Collins. "If DHS failed so utterly in preparing for and responding to

a disaster that was long predicted and imminent for days, we must wonder how much more profound the failure would be if a disaster were to take us completely by surprise, such as a terrorist attack.”

“Secretary Chertoff, as head of the Department of Homeland Security, had a responsibility to lead the federal government’s preparations for and response to Hurricane Katrina,” Senator Lieberman said. “Instead, his failures let the nation down and increased the suffering that Katrina caused.”

Today’s hearing was the 20th in a series of hearings that are part of the committee’s investigation into the government’s preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina. Chairman Collins and Ranking Member Lieberman expect to release a committee report on their investigation by the middle of March.