

## **Opening Statement of**

**Senator Susan M. Collins  
Chairman, Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs Committee**

**“National Emergency Management:  
Where Does FEMA Belong?”**

**June 8, 2006**

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**This morning, the Committee will examine the structure of national emergency management in light of what we have learned through our investigation of Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, we are here to discuss our recommendation to rebuild and strengthen FEMA and to keep it within the Department of Homeland Security.**

**I would like to thank Secretary Chertoff, Admiral Allen, and our other expert witnesses for their participation today. As always, I thank my Committee colleagues for their continuing commitment to a matter of such vital importance.**

**Of the 88 recommendations in the Committee's report on Katrina, the one we discuss today is the cornerstone. I believe that combining FEMA's existing personnel and assets with essential preparedness resources – such as grant programs and infrastructure protection initiatives – would substantially improve our emergency management capabilities. The new National Preparedness and Response Authority that Sen. Lieberman and I have proposed would be responsible not just for disaster response, as FEMA is today, but also for disaster preparedness. We must put preparedness and response back together. They are, after all, two sides of the same coin.**

**Like FEMA, the strong new agency we envision would be part of the Department of Homeland Security. This will enable the Authority to maintain close relationships with other crucial DHS assets, such as the Coast Guard and the Department's**

**law enforcement agencies. These are precisely the entities that can help in the response to a catastrophe – conducting critical search and rescue missions, and protecting lives and property. Maintaining this connection is of paramount importance if we are to build a true all-hazards, comprehensive preparation and response structure.**

**There are those who maintain that the answer is not to build a new structure within DHS, but to return FEMA to the stand-alone status it held before the Department was created. This position seems to be based on the notion that the pre-DHS years were the Golden Age of FEMA.**

**This position is not supported by the evidence. On the contrary, whether independent or a part of DHS, FEMA has had its ups and downs and successes and failures over the years. The rosy view of the years when FEMA was**

**independent ignores a long history of severe problems FEMA experienced in dealing with major disasters. After Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the Democratic Chairman of this Committee cited “victims who have bitterly complained that FEMA’s follow-up on many occasions was an even bigger disaster.” He added, “Since its inception, FEMA has been plagued with a host of problems.”**

**The Government Accountability Office found that FEMA’s response to Andrew “raised serious doubts about whether FEMA is capable of responding to catastrophic disasters.” In particular, the GAO found that the federal strategy lacked provisions to assess damage and the needs of victims, and to provide food, shelter, and other essential services when the needs of victims outstrip state and local resources. The very same problems that hampered FEMA’s**

**performance during Katrina were present a decade before DHS was even formed.**

**Just this March, at one of our Katrina hearings, Professor Herman Leonard of the Harvard Business School testified that FEMA was never designed, or prepared in its entire history, to manage a major catastrophe.**

**The FEMA Office of the Inspector General issued reports in 1994 and 1995 concluding there were not adequate controls to ensure that mission assignments were carried out at reasonable cost and with acceptable performance. In 2001, the Inspector General again concluded that FEMA had not corrected these problems.**

**The inadequate controls that the IG initially identified more than a decade ago plagued FEMA's assistance programs**

**in the aftermath of the Florida hurricanes of 2004, not to mention Katrina. Again, this is nothing new. Severe flaws in protecting the American taxpayers against waste, fraud, and abuse were flagged by the GAO in 1996 and by the Inspector General in 2000.**

**In answering the question of where FEMA belongs, it is instructive to look at the reasons FEMA was moved into DHS in the first place. In 2001, the Hart-Rudman Commission recommended that the federal government create a single department responsible for planning, coordinating, and integrating various government activities involved in homeland security.**

**The Hart-Rudman Commission called for the new department to have FEMA as its “necessary core.” The goal was to create a structure that would, in the Commission’s**

**words, “provide federal assistance for any emergency, whether it is caused by flood, earthquake, hurricane, disease, or terrorist bomb.”**

**The Commission wisely recognized that the planning and training required to prevent or respond to a terrorist attack are largely identical to the planning and training for a natural disaster. An attack by a weapon of mass destruction, for example, would likely contaminate water and food and require large-scale evacuations and shelters, just as Katrina did. The effects on our population of a pandemic disease would be the same, whether it is spread by birds or created in a laboratory and unleashed by terrorists. If FEMA were removed from DHS, a duplicative agency will inevitably have to be created within DHS. Preparedness and response are functions so fundamental to the Department’s mission that it could not operate effectively without them.**

**The “necessary core” the Hart-Rudman Commission envisioned is no less necessary today. But the “core’s” longstanding weaknesses have been exposed by Katrina, and they can no longer be ignored. FEMA must be rebuilt, and it must be a truly comprehensive national emergency management structure in the Department of Homeland Security. That is the foundation upon which our proposal stands.**