

Opening Statement
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
Business Meeting

Chairman Joe Lieberman
June 25, 2008

Good morning and welcome to our business meeting this morning. We have one nomination, eight bills, and a series of postal naming bills on today's agenda. I believe all of these measures have bi-partisan support, so hopefully we can move through them quickly. I will mention just a few of the key items on today's agenda.

Elaine Duke has been nominated as Under Secretary for Management at the Department of Homeland Security, and Senator Akaka chaired her nomination hearing last Friday.

Ms. Duke has devoted more than a quarter of a century to public service. She is clearly a highly competent and capable career civil servant.

I look forward to working with her on key issues facing DHS, especially improving procurement and contracting, the upcoming transition, and initiatives to improve management of the Department - just to name a few - and I am pleased to support her nomination.

We also have before us S.1924, the Federal Firefighters Fairness Act, introduced by Senators Carper, Warner, and Menendez. I am pleased to co-sponsor this bill, which will amend federal workers' compensation law to include as compensable the death or disabling of federal firefighters from a series of diseases – including heart or lung disease, a number of types of cancer, and certain infectious diseases. In other words, these diseases will be presumed to have been caused by the job.

Also on the agenda is H.R. 5683, the Government Accountability Office Act of 2008, introduced by Senator Collins and myself, to address a number of important issues related to pay and personnel matters, access to information, and internal operations at GAO, which is critical to Congress' oversight of the executive branch.

We will also take up S. 3175, the Pre-disaster Mitigation Act, also introduced by Senator Collins and myself – and a timely measure given the disasters now in the mid west -. This bill reauthorizes the FEMA program that gives small grants to states and locals for projects that mitigate the risk of natural disasters. The bill would codify the program as a competitive grant program, which hopefully will discourage its use for ineffective earmarks.

And finally, there is S.2148, the Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act, introduced by Senator Akaka. This bill recreates the Senior Executive Resources Office at the Office of Management and Budget in an effort to improve diversity in the Senior Executive Service - which is a goal that I also strongly support.

We have other pieces of legislation to consider so, unless Senator Collins has a statement, let's get to work.