

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

On the Nominations of Dr. Jeffrey Runge to be
Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs and Chief Medical
Officer, Department of Homeland Security; and of
Harvey Johnson, Jr., to be Deputy Administrator, Federal
Emergency Management Agency

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
December 11, 2007

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**The two nominations we are considering today
are for positions that Congress specifically
authorized last year in the Post-Katrina Emergency
Management Reform Act.**

**This Committee's comprehensive investigation
into the flawed response to Hurricane Katrina
revealed fundamental problems with our nation's
preparedness for catastrophic disasters. Our
decisions to establish the office of Chief Medical
Officer (CMO), to elevate the CMO to the level of
Assistant Secretary, and to completely retool the**

Federal Emergency Management Agency were based on key findings from the Committee's investigation.

Dr. Jeffrey Runge has been nominated to serve as the Department's primary expert for medical issues related to terrorism and natural disasters, a position he now holds on an acting basis.

The responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs and CMO at DHS are significant. They include ensuring the safety of first responders who operate in disaster areas; overseeing the work of the National Biosurveillance Integration Center; coordinating with other federal departments and agencies on medical and public health matters such as a possible influenza pandemic; and taking action to ensure the security of our food supply.

I am concerned about the role played by the Office of Health Affairs in conveying timely information about the case involving a Mexican national, infected with tuberculosis, who was able to cross the border several times.

I also am particularly interested to hear Dr. Runge's thoughts on achieving full activation of the biosurveillance center. In August, the DHS Inspector General reported slow progress on this program, largely due to frequent relocations that undermined management consistency, institutional knowledge, and momentum. Given the grave danger posed by the threat of bio-terrorism, as well as naturally occurring pathogens, I want to see more progress in this area.

Like Dr. Runge, Admiral Harvey Johnson has an impressive track record in the position for which he has been nominated. The FEMA Reform Act put heavy emphasis on qualified leadership. Admiral Johnson's leadership credentials have been sharpened through many years of service with the United States Coast Guard. Having served as Acting Deputy Administrator and Chief Operating Officer of FEMA since April 2006, he has presided over some significant improvements in FEMA's performance, for which he deserves much credit. Unfortunately, however, he also presided over a very controversial press conference, and I look forward to asking him about that matter.

I look forward to hearing the two nominees' thoughts on what they have learned from their service and what their plans are.

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