

Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

Business Meeting
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

November 14, 2007

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I would like to comment briefly on three items of special importance on our agenda: countering the threat of terrorist bombs, strengthening the role of Inspectors General in the federal government, and reforming the process for disposing of real property.

Terror bombings have a long and bloody history around the world and here in the United States. As Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff has noted, they are the weapon of choice for terrorists.

In addition, the National Intelligence Estimate has identified improvised explosive devices or IEDs as a significant homeland-security threat. Both the

FBI and DHS tell us that threat is growing, and the rise of home-grown terrorism compounds the danger and the difficulty of countering it.

The National Bombing Prevention Act of 2007 that Senator Lieberman and I introduced will improve our defenses against these weapons.

The bill has the support of DHS, organizations representing bomb-squad professionals, and several police departments.

The National Bombing Prevention Act makes the Office of Bombing Prevention the lead agency in DHS for combating terrorist explosive attacks and assigns it tasks involving national, state and local, and private-sector coordination in anti-bombing programs.

The bill also formally authorizes the National Strategy for Bombing Prevention and directs the President to update it every four years. As terrorist tactics change, our methods to prevent and respond to attacks must also evolve. Finally, the bill promotes research and development of counter-explosive technologies and facilitates transfer of military technologies for domestic anti-terror use.

The National Bombing Prevention Act of 2007 will give our country and its citizens important new protections, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Turning to our citizens' interest in honest, efficient, and effective government, I was pleased to join Senators McCaskill, Lieberman, and Coburn, in introducing the Inspector General Reform Act of 2007. I am grateful for the additional support of

Senators Akaka, Clinton, and Obama as cosponsors, and I congratulate Senator McCaskill for her leadership on this issue.

Everyone on this Committee appreciates the dedicated and productive work that IGs have done in checking federal operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and in more routine, day-to-day matters.

This reform bill explicitly requires that IGs be appointed on the basis of ability and integrity, not political affiliation. It requires 30 days' notice to Congress of an Administration's intent to remove an IG.

The bill also provides for separate budget lines for IG functions, increases pay, and prohibits cash bonuses or awards to IGs. Most IGs already refuse to

accept bonuses to avoid an appearance of conflict, with the result that many deputies earn more than the IGs. This provision will cure that anomaly while improving IGs' influence and independence.

The bill authorizes the government-wide IG Council on Integrity and Efficiency to conduct appropriate investigations of misconduct or malfeasance by IGs. And finally, it clarifies that IGs' subpoena authority extends to electronic documents.

By addressing identified short-comings and further insulating IGs from inappropriate influence, the IG Reform Act will make a critical function of government even more effective.

I look forward to a productive work session on these important measures. # # #