

Opening Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

The Improving America's Security Act of 2007
February 15, 2007

* * *

Mr. Chairman, the Improving America's Security Act of 2007 is a worthy addition to the accomplishments this Committee has already achieved in crafting a fundamental reform of our national intelligence elements and processes; establishing the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board; and devising new protections for America's seaports and chemical facilities.

Our new bill contains 12 titles, ranging from measures on terrorist travel, to certifying private-sector preparedness.

I will speak briefly on two of the main components that strike me as particularly important.

First, I invite my colleagues to note the substantial provisions for supporting state and local preparedness and response capabilities.

The approach is a sensible recognition of two truths: (1) that our large urban centers contain concentrations of people and high-value targets that invite terrorist attention, and (2) that opportunities for preventing catastrophic disasters exist well beyond those urban centers.

The bill respects these truths by making available nearly \$1.3 billion annually in totally risk-based Urban Area Security Initiative grants. It also provides \$913 million annually through the risk-based State Homeland Security Grant Program, with

a guaranteed minimum grant level for each state. To emphasize the importance of *preventing* terror attacks, both the urban and state grants programs have a minimum allocation of 25 percent of funds to support law-enforcement activities to that end.

The bill's grant provision recognizes another truth: our assessments of vulnerability and consequences may not be the same as terrorists' assessments. Their attacks – not to mention natural disasters – may originate from and strike in places we did not anticipate. The bill therefore also provides \$913 million annually in Emergency Management Performance Grants, scaled to population after reaching a minimum funding level, to help *every* state improve its all-hazards preparedness.

The other critical component I would highlight is the title devoted to emergency-communications operability and interoperability. We must never forget the frustrating and tragic episodes in the 9/11 attacks, and again during Hurricane Katrina, when responders could not talk at all, or with people who needed help, or with other responders, because of incompatible technology or infrastructure damage.

We appreciate that the Department of Homeland Security has granted nearly three billion dollars since 2003 for improving interoperable communications, but its January scorecard showed disappointing progress. An enormous task remains before us.

Today's bill is a strong step in the right direction for addressing this challenge. It creates a FEMA

grant program specifically devoted to improving communications operability and interoperability at local, state, regional, and federal levels. Each state would be guaranteed a minimum funding level, and each state applying for a grant would be required to pass at least 80 percent of their award through to local or tribal governments.

The bill's other titles are also significant. Its provisions for intelligence and information sharing, for tighter travel security, for better defenses against biological and nuclear terror threats, and for critical-infrastructure protection, will help us to continue implementing vital recommendations from the 9/11 Commission.

This bill represents a collection of sound, sensible, and effective measures made possible by

Members and staff working in bipartisan fashion for the good of the country. I urge all of my colleagues to give the Improving America's Security Act of 2007 their support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

#