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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

MICHAEL D. BOPP, STAFF DIRECTOR AND CHIEF COUNSEL
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September 23, 2005

The Honorable William Frist
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Frist:

Thank you for your letter of earlier today, and for renewing the request you first made just days after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf States, for the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee to conduct the Senate's investigation of the government's preparations for and response to the storm. I appreciate the confidence you have in the Committee, which I am proud to chair. And I hereby renew my acceptance of the responsibility you have given me as Chairman. Indeed, the Committee has already begun its inquiry, and I can assure you that it will be bipartisan, fair, and thorough, as you have directed.

Together, Senator Joe Lieberman, the other distinguished Members of the Committee, and I, working cooperatively with the select committee the House has established, will focus on answering the questions that have vexed all of America since the day the hurricane hit Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Why weren't governments at all levels better prepared for the hurricane? Once the hurricane hit, why did it take so long to mount an effective response? And what can we do to prevent this nightmare from recurring?

The Committee already has held a briefing and a hearing and will hold more in the weeks to come. The investigation, its resulting hearings, and a report on our findings will take all of our available resources and more. I appreciate very much your commitment to helping ensure that our Committee has the resources we will need to do this job right. Senator Lieberman and I are preparing a budget request and will submit it to the Rules Committee shortly.

In addition, just yesterday, our Committee marked-up and reported out six bills to provide desperately needed assistance to victims of the hurricane, to help ensure that the communications systems our first responders and emergency managers rely on are interoperable and can weather disasters, and to put in place prudent controls on what is already an unprecedented federal commitment to relief and recovery efforts.

I applaud your efforts to see that Congress carries out its obligations to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina and to investigate what went wrong. You have gone to great lengths to try to establish a commonsense approach for Congress to undertake such an investigation. Senator

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Reid's repeated rejection of your well-reasoned and fair proposals is puzzling and disappointing. And I join with you in rejecting the cynical notion that Congress cannot fairly exercise authorities given to it by the Constitution.

Congress investigates matters so that it can learn how laws need to be changed to better serve our nation. We have a duty to investigate what went wrong in the time leading up to and following Hurricane Katrina. Politics has no place in this undertaking. You have charted a course that Congress would do well to follow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Collins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan M. Collins
Chairman