

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Confirmation Hearing for Gov. Janet Napolitano
Washington, DC
January 15, 2009**

Good morning and welcome to this hearing to consider the nomination of Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano to become the nation's third Secretary of Homeland Security.

Welcome Governor. And I also want to welcome my good friends and colleagues – and your home state Senators, John McCain and Jon Kyl – who are here this morning to speak on your behalf.

I believe Gov. Napolitano is a superb choice to lead our nation's domestic security agency and help in its ongoing transition from a start-up operation to a mature agency whose component parts work together so well that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Gov. Napolitano brings the management experience that comes from being the chief executive of a fast-growing state.

She knows how to work with officials and first responders at all levels of government – a crucial qualification for this job where success is impossible without cooperation across the nation at the federal, state and local levels.

Gov. Napolitano also comes from a border state – Arizona sharing a border of more than 370 miles with Mexico. That has given the governor front-line experience on some of the challenges facing her department, like illegal immigration and border security.

As a former Attorney General of Arizona as well as a former U.S. Attorney, Gov. Napolitano also brings hands-on law enforcement experience to the job.

I believe these skills will serve the Governor well in her demanding new job – as do the International Association of Fire Fighters, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Major City Chiefs, the National Emergency Management Association, the International Association of Emergency Managers and 31 State Attorneys General.

I commend President-elect Obama for his excellent choice.

I also have a letter from House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Benny Thompson, endorsing your nomination, and I will make that part of the record.

The Department of Homeland Security was created six years ago in response to the attacks of 9-11.

Former Homeland Security Secretaries Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff did great work in leading the department through the growing pains of its early years and made progress in turning this initial amalgam of 22 agencies and 200,000 employees – all with different cultures and missions – into a single department with a singular mission to protect the safety of the American people.

Now, Governor, as the department goes through its first Presidential transition, we have confidence you will build on the work of your predecessors.

To advance this transition, this Committee intends to introduce a comprehensive authorization bill for the Department of Homeland Security that outlines key areas of improvement we think can make DHS more efficient and effective in its various missions, and recommend levels of funding for the Department.

Senator Collins and I first introduced a DHS authorization bill in the final days of the 110th Congress and will make it a priority of this committee in the 111th Congress. We look forward to working closely with you as we move to get a bill in front of the full Senate this year.

An important milestone in DHS history was reached recently when the National Capital Planning Commission gave its final approval for a new DHS Headquarters on the St. Elizabeth's campus.

Nonetheless, six years into the Department's mission, and in spite of its significant improvements in its performance, there are still those who believe DHS should be chopped up and its parts shipped off to other agencies.

I believe that is exactly the wrong way to go. It makes no sense. It would take us back to where we were on 9-11, when the terrorists exploited the vulnerability caused by the separation and balkanization of our many homeland security agencies to attack and kill 3,000 people.

Some have proposed removing FEMA from DHS and making it a free-standing agency. I will do all I can to stop such disintegration.

When Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act in 2006, we built a new, stronger FEMA, giving it a renewed mission and greater stature and resources.

Moving it out now would weaken FEMA, since the agency would no longer have the same ready access to the resources and expertise of the rest of DHS – and it would make it more, not less, difficult to coordinate in a disaster.

In the new session of Congress, this Committee will also act on the recommendations of the Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism.

That report, released in December, opened with this chilling warning: “Unless the world community acts decisively and with great urgency, it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013.”

The commission found that it would be far easier for terrorists to get their hands on biological weapons than nuclear weapons and easier also to use them to attack us.

Much legitimate biological research takes place in very poorly secured or totally unsecured facilities and, while this work can lead to medical and scientific breakthroughs, the same knowledge and expertise can also be used to build weapons of mass bio-terror that literally threaten millions of lives.

We need to craft a strong homeland and global response to protect us from this growing danger.

Governor Napolitano, as Secretary of Homeland Security, you will have a key role to play in working with other agencies – HHS, DOD, DOJ, Treasury USDA, and others who still have significant responsibilities for key aspects of homeland security.

In the Homeland Security Act, Congress established the Homeland Security Council to facilitate that critical coordination. Today, there is legitimate concern about how well that process is working, especially regarding the respective roles of the HSC and the National Security Council.

Yours will be an important voice in determining how improvements are to be made, and I look forward to working with you and other members of the President’s national security team to make sure that homeland security receives the attention it needs amidst several challenges to our nation’s overall security.

I fully support your nomination and look forward to working with you in the years ahead.

Senator Collins.