

Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

Nomination of the Honorable Janet Napolitano to be
Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

January 15, 2009

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I join our chairman in welcoming Governor Napolitano to our Committee. Two great national traumas – the terrorist attacks of 9- 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina – tragically demonstrated the loss and suffering that occur when our nation’s guard is down and we are unprepared.

As the Department of Homeland Security nears its sixth anniversary, those of us who advocated its creation can salute its accomplishments while still recognizing that it remains very much a work in progress. The men

and women at DHS have helped deter and protect our nation from terrorist attacks. Our nation's ability to prepare for and respond to all disasters has also improved dramatically with the reforms this Committee made to FEMA.

Nonetheless, constantly evolving terrorist threats and the forces of nature require further improvements at the Department. And its vital mission demands a strong, skilled leader at the helm.

I recently met with Governor Napolitano to discuss a wide range of issues, including security at our borders and seaports, cooperation with state and local law enforcement, and the myriad tests that DHS will confront in the coming years. I am impressed with the Governor's background and knowledge of homeland- security issues.

Her experience as a border- state governor is particularly welcome to those of us who represent border states with extensive cross- border trade and travel. Residents of border communities work, shop, worship, and visit family on both sides of the border, complicating the challenge of border security. Governor Napolitano understands that we have to let our friends in, while keeping our enemies out, enforcing border regulations in a practical manner as we seek to protect the American people.

Among the significant emerging challenges that the new Secretary will face is the need to enhance security at the nation's biological laboratories. The Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction has predicted a terrorist attack with a biological weapon within the next five years. The Commission pointed to lax security at

biological labs as one of the bases for that chilling assessment.

Another threat that the Department must address is the security of our nation's cyber- infrastructure. Our federal systems require an empowered coordinator that understands the cyber threat and can establish and enforce best practices across the Executive Branch. We must also redouble our efforts to work with the private sector on cyber- security.

The next Secretary must also continue to focus on the security of our nation's critical infrastructure. With more than 85 percent of those assets in private hands, this is a daunting task. Seaports and chemical facilities are two categories of infrastructure that we have made more secure through legislation that I co- authored. During the 111th Congress, I look forward to working

with the next Secretary to reauthorize these programs while continuing to strengthen the framework embodied in the National Infrastructure Protection Plan.

In the last six years, DHS has helped improve our all-hazards preparedness and response capabilities. Homeland-security grant funding for our state and local first responders has certainly played a key role in that effort. Funding levels, however, have been under attack from the Executive Branch, and DHS has not yet fully complied with the requirement to establish an all-hazards risk formula. Since every state is at risk for terrorist attacks – especially if terrorists see gaps in our defenses – it is critical that we maintain strong funding for these programs and continue to support a baseline of capabilities in every state.

It is the Federal Emergency Management Agency that forms the core of the Department's ability to perform its preparedness, response, and recovery missions. After Hurricane Katrina, this Committee wrote into law vital reforms of FEMA. Subsequent disasters like wildfires, tornadoes, and severe storms and floods have demonstrated FEMA's new and improved capabilities, bolstered by increased coordination with state and local governments and military resources.

FEMA's documented improvements and the logical combination of all-hazards prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery in a single department underscore the need to keep FEMA within DHS.

Detaching FEMA in the vain hope of recapturing mythical halcyon days would weaken its effectiveness, reduce the ability of DHS to carry out its all-hazards planning mandate, cause needless duplication of effort, and

foment confusion among state and local first responders during a disaster. As she explores this issue in more depth, it is my expectation that Governor Napolitano will eventually share this view, particularly given the strong views of our nation's firefighters and other first responders.

As a relatively new Department, DHS still suffers from significant integration and management challenges. The effective operation of the Department's 22 legacy agencies requires a strong Departmental culture, close collaboration between the Department's components, and effective cooperation with other federal, state, local, tribal, and private-sector partners. From the Department's program management and resource allocations, to the basic need for a consolidated headquarters, the next Secretary must focus intently on

removing obstacles to effective integration and improved performance.

The challenges are many, but the new Secretary can look forward to a bipartisan sense of commitment and resolve from this Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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