

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

Business Meeting

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
April 10, 2008

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We have a full and varied agenda on what promises to be a busy day in the Senate, so I will highlight some items of special interest.

I speak first on the nomination of Admiral Harvey Johnson to be Deputy Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

When Senator Lieberman and I co-authored the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, we created the Deputy Administrator's position to give FEMA a highly visible slot for new leaders with systematic management skills on essential and difficult matters like logistics and contracting.

Admiral Johnson compiled a distinguished record in the Coast Guard. He has taken steps at FEMA to correct problems identified by the Committee in its extensive investigation of the failed response to Hurricane Katrina. For example, at Admiral Johnson's direction, FEMA recently completed a "gap analysis" of the ability of 18 hurricane-prone states to prepare for and respond to those disasters. I support his nomination and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

I also urge my colleagues to support the U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act.

Created in 1974, the Fire Administration and its Fire Academy have helped prevent fires, protect property, and save lives. It is a valuable part of our

all-hazards preparations against natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

Senator Dodd and I were delighted to have fellow co-chairs of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, Senators McCain and Biden, join us as cosponsors. We are also pleased that Chairman Lieberman has joined us as a cosponsor. His leadership on issues affecting our nation's fire services is well known.

The bill enjoys the support of all the major firefighting organizations: the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Firefighters, the National Volunteer Fire Council, and the Congressional Fire Services Institute.

This legislation would increase the FY 2009 authorization for USFA to \$70 million to help meet

the unmet needs of the nation's fire services, and would increase that authorization by 1.3 percent annually through FY 2012 to meet future requirements. The bill also supports technology upgrades to the National Fire Incident Reporting System, provides for firefighter representation at the DHS National Operations Center, expands National Fire Academy training programs, and requires the USFA to increase coordination among other federal, state, and local agencies on fire prevention and emergency medical services programs.

Another bill on our agenda, S. 789, adds much-needed controls and accountability for the use of purchase and travel cards by federal employees.

I am a cosponsor of this bill, which grew out of our Committee's investigation of waste, fraud, and

abuse associated with these cards. As Chairman of the Committee, I held hearings in 2004 to examine purchase card abuse across the government and travel card abuse at the Department of Defense. In 2006, the Committee continued its review of these matters by holding a hearing on the lack of accountability in purchase card usage at the Department of Homeland Security. We all remember the card-abuse stories of the FEMA employees who purchased high-definition televisions, the Coast Guard employee who bought a \$1,200 beer-brewing kit, and the wasteful purchase of \$62,000 of dog booties that were unsuited for water rescues following Hurricane Katrina.

Just yesterday, the GAO issued another report pointing out continuing problems and recounting other examples of abuse, such as use of purchase

cards to pay for iPods and Internet dating services, and one federal employee's use of the cards' convenience-check feature to embezzle \$642,000 in Forest Service funds over a six-year period.

This bill will help prevent such outrages.

I have also cosponsored the substitute for S. 2420, the Federal Food Donation Act of 2007. This bipartisan measure mirrors a House bill approved by voice vote in December.

The bill will encourage donations of useable surplus food products to not-for-profit organizations by federal agencies and certain government contractors.

There is true need for these donations. The staff at the Preble Street Resource Center in Portland, Maine, have written me to say, "Here at the largest

soup kitchen in northern New England, we serve 425,000 meals a year. But our once overflowing food shelves are empty for the first time in decades. ... Producers are putting less food on the market; grocers are becoming more efficient at managing stock; and the secondary market is competing for surplus, buying what once might have been salvage donated to a local soup kitchen.”

By protecting the government and contractors from liability when they provide wholesome food to these charitable organizations, the bill removes a disincentive to making these much-needed donations.

America’s Second Harvest and DC Central Kitchen have endorsed the food-donation bill.

In these difficult economic times, soup kitchens and food banks are struggling to meet the growing demands of their communities. This is a common sense bill and it is my hope that it is signed into law as quickly as possible.

Finally, I am once more proud to cosponsor Senator Akaka's Senate Resolution 497 acknowledging Public Service Recognition Week, May 5th through 11th.

The resolution formally recognizes the millions of dedicated public servants who serve our nation everyday. We have all observed the skill and commitment of the men and women who serve the American public, so it is fitting that we endorse this expression of our respect and gratitude for their service.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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