

Opening Statement
Kelvin J. Cochran, Nominee
Fire Administrator, United States Fire Administration
United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator Collins, and Members of the Committee. I am Kelvin J. Cochran, nominee for Administrator of the United States Fire Administration (USFA). Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Senator Mary Landrieu for her generous introduction.

It is indeed an honor to sit before you today. I cannot help but reflect on the experience of a house fire across the alley from where my family lived in Shreveport, Louisiana. Although I was only five years old at the time, seeing the firefighters fight that fire made such an impression on me. My dream of being a firefighter when I grew up was born that day. I have been consumed with that dream from that day even until now.

Over my twenty-eight year fire service career, I have served at the local, state and national level of fire service organizations. I have had the honor of leading and serving as Fire Chief of the Shreveport Fire Department in Louisiana and the City of Atlanta Fire Rescue Department in Georgia. At the national level, I have served as President of the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association and as 1st Vice President of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). For the past two years I have had the privilege of serving on the Board of Visitors (BOV) of the USFA's National Fire Academy (NFA) in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Additionally, I am active in fire service professional associations working collaboratively on committees and task forces on issues which positively impact our industry. These experiences have provided me with a broad knowledge base and familiarity with the local and national fire service community.

If confirmed, I will have the distinct honor of serving the American people and the American Fire Service as US Fire Administrator. I believe my background and experience will bring administrative and operational expertise to the USFA in the furtherance of its mission and will enhance the fire service role in the National Response Framework.

Since its inception, the USFA has played a significant role in “ensuring domestic tranquility” through fire prevention, fire safety education, and enhancing America’s fire service response capabilities and efficiency. The post-September 11th and post-Hurricane Katrina USFA has a revised role and responsibility in preparedness and response.

The principal mission of the USFA is to provide support to America’s fire departments and fire service organizations to prevent fires, to eliminate or minimize the loss of civilian and firefighter lives when fires occur, to eliminate or minimize injuries to civilians and firefighters related to fires, and to bolster fire service preparedness for and response to natural and manmade disasters. The mission of the USFA also includes providing for the professional development of America’s fire service leaders. If confirmed as US Fire Administrator, I will work to engage federal partners, fire service stakeholders and other organizations whose missions are complementary to the USFA. I will work to improve all programs and services which enhance the fire service role to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate incidents which have the potential of causing harm to life, property and the environment in the United States of America.

Efforts to reduce property loss and loss of civilian lives continue to improve. However, the USFA needs to play a more assertive role to improve mitigation of line of duty deaths and injuries to firefighters. If confirmed, developing a vulnerability assessment instrument which

evaluates the potential risks of line of duty deaths and injuries at the local level will be a high priority.

One of the primary responsibilities of the USFA is to serve as the nation's leader in fire prevention initiatives. As such, a relentless effort toward public awareness and public education must continue. We cannot become satisfied or complacent in our efforts to reduce the loss of life and property. Campaigns yielding great results must continue. Future efforts should focus on fire safety education in multifamily and senior citizen complexes, especially in older low to moderate income minority communities to minimize incidents of mass fatality fires. The USFA should use data from the NFDC (National Fire Data Center) to identify areas across the nation that fit the demographic of highest risk populations for fire deaths, then partner with local fire departments to provide aggressive fire safety and fire prevention and awareness programs in those areas; and in multifamily and senior citizen high rise complexes.

Future USFA fire prevention campaigns should also include encouraging home builders and home owners constructing new homes to install home fire sprinkler systems. Homes constructed in rural and suburban areas where fire protection is limited should be specifically targeted.

The USFA's most notable strength is the agency's strong ties with and support from local fire departments, fire service associations, and state fire service training institutions. Additionally, USFA has a history of collaboration with all fire service stakeholders in the planning and decision making process which directly impacts fire service programs and operations across the nation. These strengths have positioned the USFA to maximize its resources to meet the needs of its stakeholders. If confirmed as Fire Administrator, I will

continue to build upon these strengths to shape the future the USFA and the fire service of the United States of America.

I thank the Committee for considering my nomination as U.S. Fire Administrator. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.