

**Opening Statement
Senator Susan Collins**

**Nomination of Ernest Mitchell, Jr.
Administrator, U.S. Fire Administration
Department of Homeland Security**

October 5, 2011

America's firefighters play a vital role in the security of our nation. Whether it is in response to a terrorist attack, a wildlands fire, or a house fire in the community, America has come to rely on firefighters. America's firefighters - - whether professional or volunteer -- always answer the call.

Stories of the heroism by these men and women, who risk their lives every day to save the lives of others, continually amaze me, and I am honored to serve as a co-chair of the Congressional Fire Caucus along with Senator Lieberman.

Recognizing the importance of the position of U.S. Fire Administrator, this committee elevated it in 2006 as part of our landmark FEMA reform law. The Fire Administrator is the steward of our nation's firefighters, and is responsible for research, data collection and analysis, and fire education initiatives.

In a report released just last week, the United States Fire Administration found that, over the past 10 years, the overall trend in fires has declined by 18 percent. During this same time period, there was also a 20 percent decline in civilian deaths and a 22 percent drop in civilian injuries. We can be proud of this progress.

According to the report, however, "although America's fire death rate is improving, it continues to be higher than more than half of the industrialized countries of the world." Sadly, during this same time period, there have been an average of 3,570 deaths and nearly 18,300 injuries per year. The Administrator must work tirelessly to improve these statistics, which represent loss and pain to American families.

We must also continue to educate and train current and future generations of firefighters. The USFA plays an important role in the professional development of fire services personnel through the National Fire Academy, by providing courses in Fire Prevention Management, Hazardous Materials, Incident Management, and Arson, as well as many other critical

subjects. In FY 2010, the NFA provided nearly 3,800 course offerings, reaching more than 113,000 students through a variety of different methods.

The Chairman and I have also been strong advocates for the FIRE and SAFER grants and earlier this year worked on legislation to reauthorize these programs through 2016.

In 2008, we reauthorized the United States Fire Administration. In this reauthorization, we updated the curriculum of the National Fire Academy, expanded the range of firefighter training programs, promoted the adoption of national voluntary consensus standards for firefighter health and safety, and established a fire service position at DHS's National Operations Center. As I am sure you are aware, the U.S. Fire Administration is up for reauthorization next year.

I am interested in hearing the nominee's vision for the U.S. Fire Administration and how he will build upon the good work that has been done.