



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing
Nomination Hearing for Dennis R. Schrader
Washington, DC
July 25, 2007

This hearing will come to order. Today this Committee will consider the nomination of Dennis R. Schrader to be Deputy Administrator for National Preparedness at FEMA.

Good morning Mr. Schrader and welcome. And, good morning and welcome to my friend and colleague Senator Ben Cardin who will formally introduce Mr. Schrader to this Committee.

The Deputy Administrator for National Preparedness is a new position within FEMA, created by DHS to implement part of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, authored by Sen. Collins and me.

That legislation was the result of this Committee's eight-month investigation into why the response to Katrina was so horribly botched at all levels of government and what needed to be done so that kind of deadly debacle was never repeated.

In the aftermath of Katrina, some called – and still do – for FEMA to be taken out of DHS. I believed – and continue to believe – that would be a serious mistake. Taking FEMA out of DHS would weaken, not strengthen the agency.

Our legislation strengthened FEMA by making it a distinct entity within DHS, similar to the Coast Guard and Secret Service, while bolstering FEMA's ability to tap into the many assets within DHS. The Post-Katrina Reform Act was designed to ensure that FEMA become the hub of the federal government's efforts to prepare for and respond to disasters of all kinds – whether natural catastrophe, devastating accident or terrorist attack.

One of the most important parts of our efforts to remake FEMA into a world-class disaster response agency was to reunite preparedness and response capabilities within FEMA. We don't want to be in the position again where we are trying to build the kind of teamwork and logistical relief operations among all levels of government in the midst of the confusion that inevitably follows a disaster, as happened with Hurricane Katrina.

As part of implementing this requirement of the Post-Katrina Act, DHS created the National Preparedness Directorate to organize and oversee key parts of our national preparedness efforts and placed it under the control of a newly created Deputy Administrator for National Preparedness – the position for which Mr. Schrader has been nominated.

Along with making sure that preparedness is fully integrated into the new FEMA, another key responsibility will be to oversee the disaster exercises and training programs we desperately need to increase readiness at all levels of government.

In our Katrina investigation, we also found that some of FEMA's senior leadership lacked sufficient emergency management and homeland security experience needed to effectively do their jobs. I note that Mr. Schrader has many of the relevant qualifications that will be an asset to him if he is confirmed.

Mr. Schrader, the responsibilities of the position for which you have been nominated – to quickly turn around our nation's lack of preparedness – are critical to our homeland security. We look forward to your answers on how, if confirmed, you will work to achieve the vision for the new FEMA created in the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Act that will get our nation prepared at all levels of government for the next disaster that is sure to come – whether it is a natural catastrophe, a devastating accident or a terrorist attack.

Let's never again have to hold hearings that ask the question: "Why weren't we prepared."

-30-