

Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

HSGAC Business Meeting

September 14, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your leadership on this first-ever reauthorization of DHS.

Last week's credible terrorist threat and the anniversary of September 11 remind us that the terrorists only have to get it right once. DHS and its partners have to be right every time, or we will suffer the consequences of an attack.

Since September 11, 2001, this Committee has passed significant legislation that created and shaped the Department - intelligence reform, the Post-Katrina law, the SAFE Port Act, chemical facility legislation, and many others. In the past six years, we have held more than 70 oversight hearings on the Department, its budget, bureaus, and its intrinsic issues. Those hearings and our investigations inform this reauthorization of DHS.

As we discussed at last week's hearing, DHS is a more effective department than it once was. But the Department must continue to mature and reach its full potential.

This first-ever authorization bill is another step toward that goal, and I would like to highlight a few provisions of the bill.

First, the bill will help to protect the Department and the American taxpayer from ill-advised contracts that pour good money after bad.

There are too many examples of costly DHS contracts for which we have little or nothing to show for our investment, including: the explosive trace detection "puffer" machines; SBInet, also known as the virtual fence; and the Transformation and Systems Consolidation, or TASC.

We must put in place processes to accurately forecast the true costs of such initiatives. This bill makes several improvements to DHS's acquisition programs, including the promotion of independent verification and validation for major IT acquisitions to prevent failed projects and the strengthening of the Cost Analysis Division.

The changes to the Cost Analysis Division, whose mission is to increase the Department's ability to make informed investment decisions, are modeled after the Department of Defense's successful Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation Office or CAPE that was re-organized by our colleagues Senators Levin and McCain in 2009.

The bill also strengthens the DHS review process to ensure that the contracts awarded meet mission needs and are within budget, schedule, and performance expectations.

Second, stopping terrorists as they to move about the world or the country continues to challenge the Department and its partner agencies. The case of the two Iraqi refugees associated with al Qaeda recently arrested in Kentucky points to this troubling gap.

The bill before us today consolidates three DHS offices with responsibilities for ensuring terrorists do not enter our country. For starters, this restructured office must do more to ensure that all relevant databases are accessed so we do not let already-known terrorists and criminals into our country.

Further, the bill calls for the Secretary to designate a lead official to coordinate efforts to counter the growing threat of homegrown violent Islamist extremism.

At a hearing last week, the DHS Deputy Secretary could not name the lead and accountable individual whose job it is to coordinate these efforts. If everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. The Department must have a designated accountable leader, and I will also continue to push for an Executive Branch-wide leader.

Third, I mentioned the Post-Katrina legislation, the law that strengthened our ability to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against all hazards.

I want to see more training at FEMA on anti-fraud practices, improvements in how they buy information technology, and a way to measure grant performance. This bill would make progress on each of these fronts.

Fourth, I will offer an amendment to prohibit DHS from collecting information about the political contributions made by businesses and individuals seeking to apply for contracts with the Department. This is similar to language that I successfully offered to the National Defense Authorization Act at the SASC markup this year, and it is needed because the Administration is actually considering an executive order mandating such information collection.

Such a requirement gives the appearance that contract award decisions could be made on -- or influenced by -- political contributions or considerations and not based on best value.

Finally, in light of the broader fiscal crisis we face, we have written a fiscally responsible bill. The authorizations levels in this bill are mostly at or below current spending. The new proposals—such as the International Travel Security Office and improvements to the DHS acquisition system—are intended to consolidate functions and save money in the long run. Where there are

proposed funding enhancements, they are measured. And, the bill includes several cuts, eliminations and consolidations, and other money-saving provisions.

For example, the bill requires that DHS find efficiencies in the field to cut overhead costs by five percent. We want real savings - not shell-game savings.

We also propose to: eliminate a redundant Office of Counter Narcotics Enforcement; end the Emergency Operation Center Grant Program; defund the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grants; and consolidate multiple FEMA youth preparedness programs and mascots, among other changes. We also require the Secretary to submit to Congress a report on consolidating grant programs administered by the Department.

We have incorporated cost-saving measures from members of this committee, GAO, the IG, current and previous Administration officials, and other experts.

Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your leadership on this authorization bill and for our partnership over the years.