

**Opening Statement of  
Senator Susan M. Collins**

**Transforming Wartime Contracting:  
Recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Contracting  
September 21, 2011**

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I want to join the Chairman in thanking the Commission members for their report. I testified at the first hearing of the Commission on Wartime Contracting and noted then that there are four categories of problems that lead to contingency contracting failures:

- unclear and evolving contract requirements;
- poor management, including an inadequate number of skilled contracting personnel;
- an unstable security environment; and
- a lack of commitment by the host government officials to the reconstruction of their own country.

Unfortunately, the Commission has documented all of these problems and more in our wartime contracting efforts. It is especially troubling that our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been plagued by such a high level of waste, fraud, and abuse.

Some of the examples are almost too astonishing to believe. For example, a July 2011 special inspector general report found that a DOD contractor was charging \$900 for a control switch that was worth a mere \$7. In some cases, the IG found contractors overbilling the government with markups ranging from 23-hundred percent to more than 12-thousand percent.

One solution to this problem is the establishment of a professional acquisition cadre. That's why I authored an amendment to the FY 2009 Defense Authorization to create a contingency contracting corps. This year, I have introduced two bills designed to further strengthen the government's acquisition workforce – the Federal Acquisition Institute Act and the Federal Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act.

I want to emphasize a point that was raised by one of the Commissioners at a recent briefing about the report. Congress should either enhance and improve the acquisition workforce to handle these types of massive contingency operations, or we should rethink whether or not we want to run these massive operations. We simply can't justify doing major contracting without the necessary supporting workforce, as the findings of the Commission's report highlight today.

This is a point that I think often gets lost in the discussion of contingency contracting. The billions spent for development and big-infrastructure contracting were "invested" in order to support counterinsurgency efforts by winning hearts and minds of the people and establishing security. But with so many disappointing results, Congress should ask:

- Are we fulfilling our obligations to the American taxpayers who are footing the bill for these projects?
- Should we really be surprised at the problems arising from attempts to run major development programs and embark on large infrastructure construction while we're in the middle of a war zone?

The past 10 years have taught us that we need to spend more time focusing on these broader questions before we get into another contingency operation, if we hope to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

As I stated at the very first Commission hearing, "How well we execute wartime contracting helps to determine how well we build the peace." In my view, we can – and must – do better.

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