

**Opening Statement for Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
Confirmation Hearing of Richard Serino/FEMA Deputy Administrator
Washington, DC
September 16, 2009**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good afternoon. This hearing will now come to order. Today our Committee will consider the nomination of Richard Serino as the Deputy Administrator to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Welcome Mr. Serino and welcome as well to Senator Kerry who is here to introduce you.

Mr. Serino began his career as a volunteer ambulance medic in 1972, steadily rising through the ranks with jobs of increasing responsibility until he was named Chief of the City Boston's Department of Emergency Medical Services in 2000.

Mr. Serino has been in command at the scene of more than 35 mass casualty events and has led EMS planning and operations for other high-profile events with high-threat potential.

In addition, since 2007, Mr. Serino has also served as Assistant Director of the Boston Public Health Commission, where he oversees public health preparedness policy and programs – including citywide preparedness efforts for H1N1 influenza.

Besides his on-the-job training, Mr. Serino has received advanced education in government and emergency management techniques from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government and the Naval Postgraduate School’s Center for Homeland Defense and Security.

The breadth of Mr. Serino’s experience has led a broad range of groups to support his nomination, some of which include the International Association of Emergency Managers and the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

I’m sure FEMA’s new Administrator, Craig Fugate – himself eminently qualified – is looking forward to having an emergency response veteran like yourself by his side as he continues the work already underway to improve FEMA after its weaknesses were exposed in the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Following the failures in responding to Hurricane Katrina, Senator Collins and I authored the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, which was signed into law in 2006.

The Post-Katrina Act strengthened FEMA, giving it significantly new and enhanced responsibilities and missions and has led to steady improvement at the agency.

This Act has led the way for FEMA to reform itself as the New FEMA and there is clear evidence that FEMA has made great improvements. For example, in recent testimony before Congress, Department of Homeland Security Inspector General Richard Skinner credited the Post-Katrina Act, in part, for his conclusion that FEMA was stronger now than it has ever been.

Additionally, IG Skinner testified before this Committee in April 2008, that FEMA was better prepared for a catastrophe now than it was when Hurricane Katrina struck.

Finally, FEMA's performance in the active 2008 Hurricane Season also demonstrates the improvements FEMA has made.

But despite FEMA's many improvements, there are still challenges to address.

Among the top priorities will be making improvements in FEMA's recovery programs.

For example, continuing to push forward on the recovery from Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast which for too long has been delayed; developing a long-term recovery strategy and improving FEMA's existing recovery programs.

Additionally FEMA must complete plans for responding to future large-scale disasters; must work with states to ensure they are better prepared for response and recovery responsibilities; and must better track where our homeland security grant dollars are going.

So if confirmed, Mr. Serino, you will have your work cut out for you and I look forward to your testimony.

Senator Collins.