



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

Nomination Hearing of Ernest Mitchell Jr.  
To be Administrator of the United States Fire Administration  
At the Department of Homeland Security  
Chairman Joe Lieberman  
October 5, 2011

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Good morning and welcome to this hearing on the nomination of Ernest Mitchell Jr. to be Administrator of the United States Fire Administration (USFA), which of course is within the Department of Homeland Security.

The USFA was established in 1974. It is the primary federal agency addressing the needs of the nation's firefighters, with the goal of reducing loss of life and economic loss due to fire and related emergencies.

The USFA has a number of specific and important responsibilities. It collects, analyzes, and disseminates data and information on fire and other emergency incidents; and it researches and develops fire prevention and fire safety technology. The agency also trains mid- and senior-level fire and emergency medical services officers at the National Fire Academy and more recently online. Last year, the National Fire Academy provided nearly 3,800 courses and reached more than 113,000 student firefighters.

USFA also assists FEMA in carrying out the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program (AFG) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant Program (SAFER). I particularly appreciate this, as these grants provide critical assistance to local fire departments and are very important to this Committee and members of both parties on the Committee. I can tell you that in Connecticut we have seen the benefits of these programs time and time again, as they have helped departments get much needed equipment, training and staff to prepare for their increased duties in responding to all sorts of disasters. Post-9/11 and post-Katrina, what we see is not just a local responsibility, but a regional and national responsibility.

Chief, I'm also mindful that you've been nominated for this position at a time when the nation's fiscal difficulties have created real pressures to dramatically reduce federal funding for just about all programs. In this climate, USFA's ability to provide timely and accurate information in emergencies, and about our capacity to respond to them, takes on added significance.

Clearly, Chief Mitchell understands firefighting and the needs of firefighters. It's hard to describe a career as accomplished as his in just a few minutes, but I'll do my best: Over the more than 33 years he has spent working for the fire service, Chief Mitchell has clearly learned the details of his professional. He started his career mapping wildland fires for the Los Angeles County Fire Department and later joined the City of Compton fire

department—where he served as a firefighter, fire inspector, arson investigator, fire captain, fire marshal, battalion chief, and special assistant to the city manager.

He subsequently served as the fire chief for the Morovia and Pasadena fire departments. And in 2003 and 2004 he served as the president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs—an organization representing nearly 13,000 chief fire and emergency officers. Somehow amid all this, Mr. Mitchell still found the time to volunteer with the American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, and the Salvation Army and give back to his community in more ways than I have the time to describe.

Your nomination has been endorsed by the International Association of Fire Fighters; the International Associate of Fire Chiefs; and the National Fire Protection Association. You certainly come before the Committee with a strong set of supporters, and that means a lot to us. I wish you the best of luck.

Senator Collins?