

**Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins
HSGAC Business Meeting
May 16, 2012**

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for putting together this agenda this morning. I want to comment on four issues on the agenda- the domestic partnerships benefits bill, the reauthorization of the U.S. Fire Administration, the nomination of Joseph Jordan – and the last item – the bill to ensure that politics is kept out of federal contracting.

First let me just mention that I'm proud to cosponsor the domestic partners benefits and obligations act with you, Mr. Chairman. You've made the important point that large employers are increasingly offering these kinds of benefits as standard fare. Domestic partner benefits are becoming increasingly commonplace, with nearly 65 percent of Fortune 500 companies, including many of our top federal contractors, extending employment benefits to domestic partners.

The federal government is going to face a potential wave of retirements and other departures in the next few years. In fact, 60 percent of the federal workforce will be eligible for retirement. That means that we're going to have a major recruitment campaign that is going to be necessary for the federal government to attract the best and the brightest. Increasingly, I've noticed that young people, in particular, are judging whether or not they want to work for a company or government agency by whether or not they have domestic partner benefits. Even though they themselves may not qualify for or need these benefits, these workers look at the presence of these benefits as a sign of the employer being a good employer. And that's one reason that I think this bill is so important.

We have a crucial battle in recruiting and retaining employees who are qualified, for example, to address the ever growing cybersecurity threat. Last week, one of our Defense Department national labs testified that the federal government is losing the battle to recruit qualified cyber experts because of the disparity in salary and benefits with the private sector. This is one way that we can make the federal government more competitive. So, like you Mr. Chairman, I view this as a matter of making the federal government's benefits structure comparable to those of large employers with whom we are competing for good talent.

I also want to mention another bill on the agenda that I think is an important —the reauthorization of the US Fire Administration. This bill has a lot of support among committee members, and it's been endorsed by all the first responder groups.

Since its creation in 1974, the Fire Administration and its fire academy have helped to prevent fires, protect property and save lives among firefighters and the public through

information campaigns, data analysis and training programs. On planes to and from Maine, I often see firefighters coming down to attend courses at the fire academy, and I've learned firsthand from Maine firefighters how extremely helpful and important those courses on firefighting are to make firefighters more effective, and to increase their safety. So I hope we can report that bill as well.

The final two items that I want to comment on are related. The first is the nomination of Joseph Jordan to be the new administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy at OMB, where, if confirmed, he will be the chief federal acquisition official for the Obama Administration. Unfortunately, the Obama Administration's position on politics and contracting has been disappointing and misguided over the last year. OFPP is not an agency that is well known to many members or to the public at large, yet it is extraordinarily important because it has responsibility for overseeing acquisition policy for the entire federal government.

There have been questions that have been raised about whether or not Mr. Jordan is sufficiently qualified for the post. Based on my analysis of his background – particularly his time at the SBA— and my extensive questioning of him, I believe that he is qualified to be the head of OFPP, even though he has considerably less experience than many predecessors.

My only qualm about Mr. Jordan has to do with whether or not he will stand up to any attempt by the administration to introduce political considerations into the federal contracting process. He became increasingly stronger as I questioned him, both in writing and at the hearing, stating his personal view that political considerations have absolutely no place in the procurement process. The only area where he has not given a completely definitive statement is whether or not he would actively oppose any attempt by the administration to issue an executive order that would force the collection of political information from potential bidders. It's clear that Mr. Jordan, however, personally believes that political considerations have no place in our federal contracting decision-making. For that reason, I will support his nomination today.

While Mr. Jordan's latest response to my question on the draft executive order is encouraging, I still believe that my bill, S. 1100, the "Keeping Politics Out of Federal Contracting Act," is necessary to ensure no administration issues a draft executive order like that contemplated by this Administration.

S. 1100 is a comprehensive bill that will ensure politics does not play any role in federal government contracting. I urge my colleagues to support this comprehensive approach to ensuring this Administration or any subsequent Administration will not in any way inject politics into the procurement process. It is vital that we ensure agencies adhere to the fundamental principle that the federal procurement process must be grounded solely and unequivocally on providing for competition and the very best value to American taxpayers.