

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SUSAN M. COLLINS Joint Oversight Hearing of the Committee on Governmental Affairs and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Over this past year, I have been deeply troubled by the revelations regarding the efforts made by the People's Republic of China to acquire our most sensitive technology. The report of the House Select Committee revealed that design information has been stolen on all of the nuclear warheads that the United States currently has deployed. With this information, the PRC has rapidly assimilated stolen nuclear secrets into its own weapons systems and advanced its nuclear program by approximately forty years.

Not only am I deeply concerned about these incidents of espionage, I am even more disturbed by the lackadaisical response by the Clinton Administration. After DOE learned about the theft of information in 1995, the Administration failed to undertake a serious reassessment of our intelligence security. In fact, only after the espionage accounts were widely reported by the news media earlier this year did the President take any serious action to reevaluate the security of our weapons labs.

In March of this year, the President belatedly requested that the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board ("PFIAB") undertake an inquiry on the security threat at the Department of Energy's weapons labs. This thorough review, chaired by the former Senator Warren B. Rudman, found the Department of Energy responsible for the worst security record that the members of the advisory board had ever encountered. The Board cited DOE for "organizational disarray, managerial neglect and a culture of arrogance," and warned that absent significant change, the weapons laboratories would continue to be a major and successful target of foreign intelligence services. The report concluded that the only way to combat these problems is to take the oversight of our weapons labs away from what the Board described as the "dysfunctional bureaucracy" of the Department of Energy and give it to a new, semi-autonomous agency.

Cognizant of the seriousness of the problem, Congress acted quickly on these recommendations. I was a cosponsor of both Senator Lott's amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill and of the amendment offered by Senators Domenici, Kyl, and Murkowski to the Intelligence Authorization Bill. Language to establish the new agency, the National Nuclear Security Administration, was ultimately included in the Defense Authorization signed into law by the President on October 5.

When this bill was signed, I expected the President was going to abide by the law. Instead, he and Secretary Richardson have blatantly defied the intent and the letter of the law by circumventing virtually every single provision designed to ensure the independence of the NNSA from the bureaucratic structure of the DOE. This is completely unacceptable.

I hope the Secretary will testify today that he is committed to following the law -- as he is required to do.