

**Opening Statement
Senator Susan M. Collins
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs**

**Nomination of
Gregory B. Cade
To be Administrator of the U.S. Fire Administration**

March 15, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to you, Chief Cade. The agency Chief Cade has been nominated to lead – the U.S. Fire Administration – plays a crucial role in securing our nation, and I look forward to discussing its important mission with him today.

From Ground Zero on September 11th to the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to the numerous emergencies that arise every day in communities across our nation, firefighters risk their

own lives to protect others. They serve as one of the pillars of the communities across our great land.

Whether career or volunteer, America's nearly 1.2-million firefighters exemplify professionalism, dedication, and heroism.

Since Congress established the agency 33 years ago, the Fire Administration has served as an invaluable resource for training, research, and public education. Perhaps most impressive is the progress that the Fire Administration has made in helping to reduce fire deaths by more than half -- a remarkable record of accomplishment.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Fire Administration has become an even more vital component of our nation's emergency preparedness and response structure. From the

inception of the Department of Homeland Security, this Committee has worked hard to ensure that the Fire Administration has a special place within the Department, serving not only as the voice of America's firefighters, but also as one of the Secretary's principal advisors on first responder issues. For example, our FEMA reform legislation elevated the Fire Administrator to the position of Assistant Secretary.

Although the Fire Administration and the Department face many significant challenges, no issue is more pressing than the continuing difficulty our first responders have in talking with each other in real time and on demand during times of crisis. In his interview with the Committee, Chief Cade explained that new technology will play an important role in improving emergency

communications. But he also explained that we must not overlook other barriers to effective emergency communications. Non-technological barriers -- such as the absence of governing agreements and standard operating procedures -- also impede progress in this area. These are, indeed, crucial elements of our nation's efforts to improve emergency communications, and I look forward to exploring these issues with him this morning.

I am also interested in the Chief's perspective on the Department's first responder grant programs, including the FIRE Act program. The Committee has worked hard to improve the grant programs that strengthen our State and local homeland security partners.

Chief Cade began his distinguished 40-year career as a volunteer firefighter -- an invaluable background for the position to which you have been nominated. In my home state of Maine, 338 of our 405 fire departments are led by volunteer chiefs. Nationally, more than 823,000 of our firefighters are volunteers - nearly three out of every four. They truly are the backbone of our nation's emergency response system.

Despite the critical role of these volunteers, the Fire Administration, in its Second Needs Assessment for the U.S. Fire Service, noted that the number of volunteer firefighters has been in decline for the past several years. While many reasons have been cited for this drop, including social and economic reasons, many experts believe that increased training requirements and the consequent time

commitments are significant factors. This trend, if not reversed, will have dire consequences for communities -- especially in rural areas -- and will impede our nation's ability to respond to disasters, whether man-made or natural.

I commend Chief Cade for an outstanding career in public service and, look forward to hearing his testimony.