

Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

Business Meeting

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
February 11, 2009

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we convene our first business meeting for the 111th Congress, I want to welcome my colleagues – both returning and new. I look forward to building on the Committee’s record of bipartisan accomplishments as we work together this Congress to make our nation safer and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our federal government.

I want to briefly comment on the first item on the Committee’s agenda today: the Committee’s funding resolution. While the Chairman and I have different views on whether we should continue to create “ad hoc” subcommittees, I certainly appreciate the efforts that he has made to ensure that the impact of the new

subcommittees on minority budgets is minimized. I would also note that our Committee is unique in generously funding its subcommittees and giving the subcommittee chairmen and ranking members authority to hire whomever they select to staff those subcommittees.

After the Committee resolves its administrative details for this Congress, we will return to an issue that the Committee carefully examined in 2007 – whether the District of Columbia should be granted a representative in the House of Representatives with full voting rights.

As a matter of fundamental fairness, I believe that residents of the District of Columbia should have voting representation in the U.S. House of Representatives. How to grant this representation in a manner consistent with the Constitution is a more difficult question.

Last year, our Committee heard varying views on this issue from respected Constitutional scholars. While the constitutionality of this legislation is a close call, I believed then, as I do now, that this question is best resolved by the courts and not by this Committee. Moreover, given my support for the underlying goals of the legislation, I was pleased that the Committee adopted two important amendments I offered that are now part of the underlying bill.

The first amendment made clear that Congress by statute cannot create Senate representation for the District, representation specifically reserved to the States by our Constitution. The second amendment provided for expedited judicial review of the constitutionality of this legislation should it be challenged in the courts.

With these amendments now included in the underlying bill, I will again support reporting this legislation to the full Senate.

I know the Committee has a full agenda to consider today, so I will again thank the Chairman for his leadership of the Committee. I remain committed to working with you and all the members on the many and varied issues that come before this Committee. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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