

OPENING STATEMENT

Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins
Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on raising EPA
to Cabinet level

I would like to begin by thanking Senator Lieberman for convening today's hearing and for recognizing the importance of elevating EPA to cabinet-level status. It is clear, Senator Lieberman, that you have a deep appreciation for environmental protection -- an appreciation

which I share. In fact, I have frequently had the pleasure of joining you as a cosponsor on innovative bills to improve the quality of our environment. I thank you not only for convening today's hearing, but also for selecting the Boxer-Collins bill for the Committee's consideration.

I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to Senator Thompson. Senator Thompson knows how much this issue means to me and, with his customary grace, has allowed me to serve in his place as the Ranking Member during today's hearing. Senator Thompson has always done an excellent job leading this committee.

Perhaps most important, I would like to thank Senator Boxer and our House colleague, Congressman Boehlert, for their leadership on this issue. I am pleased to join Senator Boxer, the architect of the Senate bill, in bringing S. 159 before this committee. I look forward to working with her to ensure that this legislation becomes law.

There are a lot of very good reasons to elevate EPA to cabinet level status. We will hear about these reasons today, so I am not going to go through a litany of them now.

Instead, I am simply going to say why this bill is important to me. In a sentence, it comes down to ensuring that environmental decisions are front and center when decisions are made by any Administration. Elevating EPA to cabinet-level status will give the agency the resources and the voice to do a better job for the economy and the environment.

In order to achieve the cleanest environment in the most

efficient manner possible, today's problems require innovative solutions that span state and international borders. Let me cite just one example that is very important to me and my home state of Maine: mercury pollution. In Maine, every lake, river, and stream is subject to a state mercury advisory warning of the health risks for pregnant women of consuming fish from those waters. However, much of this mercury originates from outside of Maine, and a significant fraction comes from beyond the borders of the United States.

To address problems such as these, EPA will need a strong relationship with the Secretary of State and other members of the President's Cabinet; EPA will need ready access to the President; and EPA will need the best possible people to devise innovative and flexible solutions. S. 159 will help EPA achieve these goals. In short, elevating EPA to cabinet level will help the agency acquire the resources necessary, and command the attention needed, to do the best possible job of protecting human health and preserving the environment.

I would note that the Congress has tried many times before to elevate EPA to cabinet-level status. Each time it has failed - not from opposition to the idea itself, but as a result of extraneous baggage that was added to each effort. We can all think of mistakes that EPA has made, and of ways in which Congress could restructure the agency to make it work better. The trouble is, it is difficult to get consensus on these ancillary issues.

The one thing upon which I hope we can all agree is that EPA should be included in the President's Cabinet. I would like to hear from my colleagues on both sides of the aisle on additional ways to improve EPA. Let's talk about improvements, and think about additional ways to move forward. But let's not get so mired in other issues that we don't get this bill enacted. S. 159 stands on its own merits, and deserves to be passed. I hope my colleagues will join me in doing that which many Congresses have tried to do before, but failed: elevate EPA to cabinet-level status.

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