

Opening Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

“Ensuring Full Implementation of
the 9/11 Commission’s Recommendations”

January 9, 2007

Mr. Chairman, this is the first Homeland Security Committee hearing of the new Congress, and it appropriately reflects the change in control of the Senate.

What has not changed, of course, is my high regard for the wisdom, leadership, and collegiality of our new Chairman, my respect for all of our members, and my belief that this Committee will continue to pursue a course of civility and cooperation, producing bipartisan legislation that benefits the American people. That is the proud tradition of this Committee.

As members of the Homeland Security Committee, we conduct our work ever mindful that thousands of lives were lost on 9-11, that terrorists still threaten our nation, and that we must protect Americans against that threat. The presence today of family members of victims of the terror attacks of September 11th is a vivid reminder of our solemn responsibilities – responsibilities that transcend partisan politics.

I also look forward to hearing the testimony of Mayor Bloomberg, whose leadership on counter-terrorism has been outstanding, and of three former members of the 9/11 Commission, Senator Slade Gorton and Congressmen Lee Hamilton and Tim Roemer, who provided the Committee with so much good guidance as we drafted the Intelligence Reform Act in 2004. I also welcome the testimony of the president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and of Connecticut’s homeland-security leader.

As the title of this hearing indicates, our task is by no means finished. We would, however, be remiss if we did not recognize that Congress has already enacted many significant measures to achieve the goals of the 9/11 Commission.

In 2004, a Herculean, bipartisan effort by this Committee made possible the most significant reform in the structure and operation of our intelligence community in more than 50 years.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 established the position of Director of National Intelligence and created a National Counterterrorism Center to coordinate intelligence analysis and operational planning for counterterrorism.

This major reform legislation also:

- Improved interagency information-sharing;
- Strengthened border and transportation security;

Hindered terrorist travel by consolidating threat screening and improving the visa issuance process;

Expanded our ability to cut off the financing that enables terrorist activities; and

Established congressional expectations for coordinating diplomatic, military, and foreign-aid initiatives in the war on terror.

Mindful of the balance between greater security and the civil liberties and privacy rights cherished by all Americans, we also established the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board and created two new privacy and civil liberties officers.

As this partial summary suggests, the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission were the basis for many provisions in the Intelligence Reform Act.

More recently, this Committee wrote the new laws that greatly strengthened protections for America's cargo ports and chemical facilities, again addressing vulnerabilities highlighted in the Commission report.

Implementing these Commission recommendations did not lighten our workload, however. Adopting a new policy or creating a new program demands diligence in monitoring implementation and results. For example, the Department of Homeland Security has granted nearly three billion dollars since 2003 for improving interoperable communications, so vital to any coordinated disaster response. Yet, just last week DHS reported that only six of 75 cities it surveyed had received top marks for interoperable communications.

More work must be done in the area of interoperable communications – on this, members of this Committee and the Commission can agree.

Legislative efforts to implement the 9/11 Commission's recommendations were hard-fought and produced much progress. But the Commissioners warned that one recommendation, if left unfulfilled, could undermine all those that were adopted.

The Commission delivered this stark verdict: "Congressional oversight for intelligence – and counterterrorism – is dysfunctional." The Commission made reform of Congressional oversight a key recommendation for bolstering America's defenses, noting that "The other reforms we have suggested ... will not work if congressional oversight does not change, too."

The 9/11 Commission called for a joint intelligence committee or, alternatively, for intelligence committees in each house with combined authorizing and appropriating authorities. We have neither.

The 9/11 Commission also urged each house to establish an oversight committee for all homeland-security issues. The Commission noted that DHS officials were appearing before 88 committees and subcommittees.

Although the House and Senate have established such committees, their jurisdiction is far from complete. The House Homeland Committee does not have full jurisdiction over FEMA. This Committee lacks jurisdiction over several DHS components, including the two largest agencies.

Mr. Chairman, I fully agree that urgent, unfinished business remains as we review the progress we have made in passing the 9/11 Commission's recommendations.

Yet, Congress is not a rubber stamp. The 9/11 Commission did a terrific job, and I agree with, and have worked hard to implement, many of its recommendations. But the thorough process that this Committee undertook to study the report demonstrated that not every single recommendation should be enacted.

For example, the Commission recommended that the Department of Defense rather than the CIA be the lead agency for directing and executing paramilitary operations. The DOD, the CIA, and many experts opposed that recommendation, and Congress did not adopt it.

Nevertheless, it is fitting that we start our work in the new year by evaluating our progress in countering threats facing our country. I look forward to working with both returning and new Members of the Committee to identify and advocate added protections for our fellow citizens, and I once again thank the 9/11 Commission, the families of the victims of the terrorist attacks, state and local officials, and other experts for their guidance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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