

Statement of Chair Jane Harman – As Prepared
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing & Terrorism Risk Assessment

“The Resilient Homeland: How DHS Intelligence Should Empower America to Prepare for, Prevent, and Withstand Terrorist Attacks”

10:00 A.M., Thursday, May 15, 2008

“For more than six years, the Bush Administration has been relentlessly sounding the alarm about apocalyptic terrorist groups, but meaningful guidance to first responders about what to look for and what to do has been in short supply.

One of today’s witnesses, a valued friend and counselor, Dr. Stephen Flynn, labels this a “toxic mix of fear and helplessness” in his recently published article, “America the Resilient.” He sees it increasing the risk that the U.S. government will overreact to another terrorist attack.”

I agree. And what Dr. Flynn says about resiliency and information sharing is also on the mark:

“After decades of combating Soviet espionage during the Cold War, the federal security establishment instinctively resists disclosing information for fear that it might end up in the wrong hands.

“Straight talk about the country’s vulnerabilities and how to cope in emergencies is presumed to be too frightening for public consumption.”

The American people deserve honesty about what threatens us, and an open discussion about what we need to do to protect ourselves and our families from the terrorists who want to kill us.

This Subcommittee has spent the last year and a half working to get intelligence right for State, local, and tribal law enforcement officers – the people who will most likely see something out of place and act to prevent the next attack.

Starting with the information needs of State and locals is the way to go – as Matt Bettenhausen of California, Juliette Kayyem of Massachusetts and Frank Cilluffo at GW at last month’s hearing made abundantly clear.

And there is good news here. Police and sheriffs’ officers increasingly see themselves as our nation’s “first preventers.”

At the same time, they have started to understand the full impact of what that means: that the critical infrastructure in their communities – power plants, mass transit, public health, chemical facilities, roadways, bridges, telecom – are all part of their protective responsibility.

We are (finally) making progress, a point I stressed at a major conference in San Francisco in March. The Department’s intelligence products are better. They include some local input and put first preventers and the private sector on notice about:

Which terrorist plots most threaten the homeland;

What State, local, tribal, and private sector leaders should do to prepare for them so we can “bounce back” quickly after an attack; and

How best to put those preparations into action by running drills and exercises and testing the resiliency of the systems we are establishing.

By honestly assessing our vulnerabilities – and preparing all levels of government, the private sector, and the public to protect against them – we will become more and more secure in our ability to withstand attacks from our enemies. In short, terrorism will be less terrifying.”