

Draft 9-11 Markup Statement

Good morning and welcome to this business meeting devoted primarily to the markup of a bill further implementing or improving on the recommendations of the 9-11 Commission.

We have made substantial progress since the Commission issued its report in 2004. With the passage of the 2004 Intelligence Reform legislation, we created a strong Director of National Intelligence with the budget and personnel authority necessary to coordinate our national intelligence efforts.

We created a National Counterterrorism Center to connect more of the intelligence dots, which were left scattered before 9/11, and to coordinate strategic operational planning across the federal government to fight terrorism.

We also mandated the development of an Information Sharing Environment to facilitate sharing of national security related information, and won improvements to border and transportation security.

These are significant achievements and they have improved our nation's intelligence capabilities and our security.

But – as we heard from some of the 9-11 Commissioners and family members of 9-11 victims at a Committee hearing in January – there are still some things that have been left undone or that we need to do better. That is to be expected. Securing our nation against the terrorist threat is the challenge of our age – and it will be an ongoing challenge.

The 9-11 Commissioners said as much in their report:

“The men and women of the World War II generation rose to the challenges of the 1940s and 1950s. They restructured the government so that it could protect the country.

“That is now the job of the generation that experienced 9-11. Those attacks showed, emphatically, that ways of doing business rooted in a different era are just not good enough. Americans should not settle for incremental, ad hoc, adjustments to a system designed generations ago for a world that no longer exists.”

Today we continue the process of securing our nation in this new era where our enemies don't wear uniforms, or attack with fleets of planes and ships, but, rather, try to move silently among us – probing for weakness while plotting disaster.

This is vitally important work and we will continue to pursue it in the bipartisan tradition established by former Chairman Collins when this Committee first considered the 9-11 Commission's recommendations.

Among the items we will consider today are:

1. Improving counter-terrorism information sharing both within the Department of Homeland Security and also with state and local governments. The bill creates standards for state and local fusion centers, assigns federal intelligence analysts to them, and creates intelligence fellowship programs for state and local officials.
2. A new and more comprehensive approach to homeland security grant reform, that ensures that terrorism-oriented homeland security grants are distributed overwhelmingly based on risk, while at the same time enhancing all-hazards emergency management grants to ensure that all states have basic capacities to prepare for and respond to both man-made and natural disasters.

3. Creating an interoperable grant program within FEMA dedicated to providing helping state, local and tribal governments build communications systems that allow first responders from different organizations to talk with each other in a disaster or crisis.
4. The 9-11 Commission said that restricting terrorists' ability to travel freely was just as important as crippling their financial networks. But the Visa Waiver Program, which allows citizens from 27 countries to enter the United States without applying for a visa, is a serious security vulnerability we must address. It is increasingly clear that nationals from Visa Waiver Programs can be terrorists, and that travel documents from those countries too easily fall into the wrong hands. The bill contains robust security enhancements to the Visa Waiver Program so we can detect terrorists trying to enter the United States before they've boarded a plane.
5. This bill seeks to strengthen the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board to ensure that as we fight terrorism, we do not trample on the very rights and liberties of Americans we are pledged to defend. This provision passed the Senate in 2004 but was weakened in Conference.
6. This bill would declassify the top line of the national intelligence budget, as the 9/11 Commission originally recommended and as the Senate had approved in 2004.
7. And with this bill, we want to establish a voluntary accreditation program for private sector preparedness that would provides companies with a roadmap to improve the security of their facilities and the readiness of their employees.

As we take up this work, I want to again thank 9-11 Commission Chairman Thomas Kean, Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton, the other eight commissioners and the commission staff for their excellent work. The Commissioners are still working to make this nation safer against terrorism, and last month this Committee heard from Commissioners Hamilton, Gorton and Roemer concerning the problems that remain unaddressed.

In the preface to their report, Chairman Kean and Vice Chairman Hamilton wrote: “We hope our report will encourage our fellow citizens to study, reflect – and act.”

And that is precisely what we will do today and in future hearings. It is the vital mission of our generation to build a safer and more secure nation for the generations to come.

Thank you.

Senator Collins.