

**Opening Statement
Senator Susan M. Collins
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs**

**“Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland:
Six Years after 9/11”**

Sept. 10, 2007

Tomorrow is the anniversary of a day that six years later still defies understanding. The loss of nearly 3,000 innocent men, women, and children, the cruelty of the attackers, and the courage at the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and aboard Flight 93 remain beyond the ability of our minds to comprehend fully or our words to express adequately.

It is appropriate that we are holding this hearing today, the eve of this somber day of remembrance. If there is one thing we fully understand about September 11th, it is that the horror of that day was

made possible by what has been called September 10th thinking. What the 9/11 Commission so memorably termed a “failure of imagination” was exploited by our enemies with devastating effectiveness.

Events in my home state on September 10th, 2001, illustrate the collision course between innocence and hatred.

On that day, Robert and Jackie Norton drove from their home in Lubec, Maine, to Bangor, the first leg of a cross-country trip to the West Coast for a family wedding. Early the next morning, a commuter plane would take the beloved retired couple to Boston, where they would board Flight 11.

On that day, James Roux of Portland, an Army veteran, a devoted father, and a man known for his generosity and outgoing spirit, was packing for a business trip to California. He left Logan the next morning on Flight 175.

On that day, Robert Schlegel of Gray, Maine, was celebrating his recent promotion to the rank of Commander in the United States Navy, and settling into his new office at the Pentagon. His office was believed to be the point of impact for Flight 77.

And on that day, Mohammed Atta and his fellow terrorist rented a car in Boston and drove to Portland. They checked into a motel, ate pizza, and made their final preparations. When they boarded their commuter plane for Logan the next morning to

seize control of Flight 11, they left behind a trail of dots – of financing and training, of global travel and visa violations, and of known terrorism involvement – that would not be connected until it was far too late. Complacency, turf battles, and intelligence failures prevented the coordination and communication that might have allowed the 9/11 plot to be detected in time.

Nevertheless, the people of our great nation responded to those attacks with determination, unity, and a sense of purpose. My concern is that our response may be in danger of flagging. If we allow ourselves to become complacent, to revert to “September 10th thinking,” the next attack will be due not to a failure of imagination, but a failure of resolve.

Today's hearing is held in the context of the intelligence community's recent National Intelligence Estimate on the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland, which judged that the United States will face a "persistent and evolving terrorist threat over the next three years."

The key words are "persistent" and "evolving." This Committee has dedicated itself to anticipating the changing nature of terrorism and to addressing our vulnerabilities. One of our concerns is a central issue raised in the NIE.

That issue is homegrown terrorism. The NIE assessment is that the growing number of radical, self-generating terror cells in Western countries

indicates that the radical and violent segment of the West's population is expanding. In our own country, the Torrance, California, case and the Fort Dix and JFK airport plots all illustrate that we are not immune to domestic terror cells. These homegrown terrorists - inspired by al Qaeda's hate-filled perversion of the Muslim faith - will challenge the ability of our law enforcement and intelligence agencies to respond effectively.

The Committee has conducted extensive investigations of this phenomenon, in particular the radicalization of prison inmates, the use of the Internet as a radicalizing influence, and the lessons learned by our European allies who also face this threat. I am very interested in discussing with our

witnesses how we can best counter this clear and escalating threat.

The NIE also states that al Qaeda remains driven by an undiminished intent to attack and continues to adapt and improve its capabilities. Even more disturbing is what the report further concludes—that although worldwide counterterrorism efforts have constrained the ability of al Qaeda to attack us again, the level of international cooperation may wane as 9/11 becomes a more distant memory and perceptions of the threat diverge.

In other words, we are challenged not just by a ruthless, calculating, and patient enemy, but also by our resolve. The names of Robert and Jackie Norton, of James Roux, of Commander Schlegel, and of so

many others must never become distant memories. They must always remain vivid reminders of the terrible price that was paid for September 10th thinking. The threat that was so fully and terribly revealed on September 11th is not a matter of divergent perceptions. It is a persistent and evolving reality that we must continue to confront.