

Testimony of Mary Fetchet
U.S. Senate Governmental Affairs Committee
Washington, D.C.
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Honorable Chairman Collins, Senator Lieberman and other distinguished members of the Governmental Affairs Committee, I am honored to be here today to testify on behalf of the 9/11 families.

My name is Mary Fetchet, I am a member of the 9/11 Family Steering Committee and Founding Director and President of Voices of September 11th, a 9/11 family advocacy group. More importantly, I am the mother of Brad Fetchet, who tragically lost his life at the age of 24 in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th.

We appreciate your urgency in holding these hearings to address the critical task of implementing the recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission. We are equally indebted to the 9/11 Commissioners and their staff, who worked tirelessly in a bipartisan manner over the last year to examine the events that led to the attacks and to develop recommendations to prevent future tragedies. The Commission may not have answered all our questions, but its report does offer a much-needed overall strategy to develop a comprehensive foundation for creating a safer America.

The challenge now before all of us is whether we have the national will to combat a political bureaucracy, general inertia and the influence of special interest groups in order to enact a comprehensive set of recommendations to improve our national security. This work will not be easy. It is, however, essential if we are to protect our families and our country.

The last three years have been a painful education for me. It began on September 11th 2001 when my husband contacted me at work to let me know Brad had called him shortly after the first plane hit Tower One. Brad was on the 89th floor of Tower 2 and he wanted to reassure us that he was okay. He was shaken because he had seen someone falling to the ground from the 91st Floor "all the way down". But Brad told my husband he expected to remain at work for the remainder of the day. The Port Authority, after all, had used

the PA system to assure everyone in Tower 2 that they were safe and directed them to remain in the building. Brad remained with his co-workers in their office as they were told, other individuals who attempted to evacuate Tower 2 at that time were ordered back up to their offices. Shortly after my husband's call I witnessed the plane hit Tower 2 on television. The image is forever etched in my mind for it was at that moment that I knew our country was under attack and that Brad was trapped in a high rise building which he wouldn't be able to escape.

I never had the opportunity to speak with Brad. We later learned from a message he left his girlfriend at 9:20 a.m. that he was attempting to evacuate after his building was hit by the second plane. Obviously Brad and his co-workers never made it out. He and nearly 600 other individuals in Tower 2 who should have survived if they had been directed to evacuate, died senselessly as a result of unsound directions. As a Mother, it didn't make sense to me why they were directed to remain in a 110 story building after the high rise building next door had been hit by a plane; had a gaping hole in its side and was engulfed in flames.

Since that day I have come to recognize the inadequacies in our overall preparedness as well as the grave responsibilities and the inexcusable inertia of our political system. As with many who worked on the 9/11 Commission's Family Steering Committee, I came to Washington as a political novice, totally unfamiliar with politics or the political system, without a party affiliation.

Every election day, I voted for individuals irrespective of political party who I thought would best represent our country. However, my political involvement ended when I cast my ballot, assuming like most that my elected officials would act in my best interest, ensure my family's safety and counter any terrorist threats. I believed that my government was a cohesive organization whose officials and agencies, in the interest of national security, would share intelligence, collaborate, and coordinate their counter terrorism efforts. Sadly I was wrong.

Like others, I have also tried to make sense of my son's death and those of the nearly 3,000 other innocent citizens by collecting and scrutinizing

newspaper reports on 9/11 issues. Two important themes quickly became apparent. ONE system didn't fail our country; virtually ALL systems failed. They failed to follow existing procedures and failed to have protocols or effective lines of communication in place, leading to widespread breakdowns in our preparedness, defense and emergency response. The other painful realization was that our government is often paralyzed by partisanship and complacent to a fault.

Our sad and frightening pre-9/11 history includes pervasive failures and shortcomings within and amongst our government agencies due to breakdown in communications on all levels, lack of direction and overall strategic plan and a disconnect between policy, priorities and allocation of funds. More specifically, failures occurred due to:

- Intelligence agencies not sharing information within and amongst their organizations despite their common responsibility to protect our country;
- Not leveraging or updating technology already in place, which would have helped identify and stop these terrorists from entering our country or passing through domestic airport security check points and ultimately preventing them from turning passenger planes into weapons;
- Inadequate or failed procedures and communications systems that prevented emergency response teams from effectively working with each other, connecting to workers in the World Trade Center, and communicating with outside agencies such as airports and buildings identified as targets;
- Failure of the North American Air Defense Command and the FAA to have a protocol in place to rapidly identify and respond to hijacked planes;
- Failure of the FBI to process and act on Colleen Rowley's report and the Phoenix memo which would have identified terrorists and the potential for planes to be used as weapons;

- Failure of the legislature to act on earlier recommendations to address the threat of terrorism, such as those proposed by the Hart-Rudman Commission and those related to airline security by the Gore Commission;
- Allowing special interest groups to undermine or block preventive safety measures that could have prevented the 9/11 attacks in an effort to save money;
- Failure of our government and its intelligence agencies to have an overall strategy, to establish and coordinate policies, priorities and procedures based on the escalating threat of terrorism.

Colonel Randall Larsen and Ruth A. David of the Anser Institute for Homeland Security summed up the situation facing pre-9/11 America in an article published in Strategic Review in the Spring of 2001.

“What is needed now is leadership from the administration,” they wrote. “There is widespread concern that threats to our homeland are both real and growing...However, one of the most troubling questions yet to be answered is whether substantial changes such as those recommended by Hart-Rudman or Collins-Harowitz, can be made unless America experiences a tragic wake-up call.” Ultimately Larsen and David asked: “Will the administration and Congress have the vision and courage to act before we experience another Pearl Harbor or something far worse that could change the course of history?”

We all recognize that we have experienced another Pearl Harbor now known as September 11th. The administration and Congress did not have the vision or the courage to act on previous information. Now 3 years after this tragic event and the death of nearly 3,000 innocent victims it is apparent the status quo is unacceptable and reform is necessary. The questions we now face are two-fold: Are we prepared and, if not, are we ready to move decisively to embrace a comprehensive overhaul, such as the ones presented by the 9/11 Commission.

As a nation, we remain amazingly ill prepared to prevent an attack or at least minimize its impact. This is especially frightening since we are under a greater threat than ever.

Consider for a moment that we live under a heightened national terrorist alert and yet 3 years later systems have not been put in place to educate our families, our schools, our communities on how to prepare for another attack. Several initiatives have been put in place since 9/11, yet many of the core problems within and amongst government agencies have not been addressed.

- Communications systems are still inadequate;
- Community and city-wide preparedness plans have not been effectively established or communicated;
- Government agencies and legislative groups do not effectively share or leverage intelligence and general information or even readily accept it from the public as I know firsthand;
- An effective, government-wide control center for all intelligence has yet to be established, and;
- Crucial Congressional oversight and budgetary control of this effort is not in place;

Some in Washington have warned that it may take three to five years to enact all the measures needed. That is not acceptable to the families of 9/11 or the American people. Our enemies are preparing to strike us now and the longer we wait to move decisively, the greater advantages and opportunities they have to harm us.

Former Defense Secretary William Cohen put the impact of unchecked aggression into perspective six years ago in speaking to New York's Council on Foreign Relations: "No government can permit others to attack its citizens with impunity if it hopes to retain the loyalty and confidence of

those it is charged to protect.” Americans have lost faith in our government and its ability to protect us. You must act now to restore it.

I recognize the challenge with moving a federal bureaucracy, however well meaning, in a new direction. Like any system, change and restructuring are difficult. Special interest groups, turf battles and simple fear of the unknown can all work against reform. Yet when American lives are at stake, indifference or inertia is unacceptable. I am confident you realize what is at stake and are up to the challenge. We must embrace a complete and interlinking set of recommendations proposed by the 9/11 Commission. This plan should include the creation of a National Counterterrorism Center (CTC) and the appointment of a National Intelligence Director (NID) who reports directly to the White House. The NID should:

- Oversee all our national intelligence and counter-terrorism activities;
- Develop an overall strategy to promote national and regional preparedness;
- Coordinate policies, priorities and protocols amongst the 15 intelligence agencies;
- Authorize and allocate the budget and resources to execute this strategy;
- Ensure qualified individuals are appointed to key posts and have the ability to hire, fire and more importantly promote individuals who are proactive in the fight against the war on terrorism;

The aim is simple: a coordinated and comprehensive approach in gathering information and operating our intelligence agencies. I recognize that this committee is charged with solely examining intelligence issues, but we must not allow ourselves to be shortsighted or piecemeal in our approach to America’s safety. We must examine and embrace all of the Commission’s 41 recommendations for they are interconnected. As Governor Kean has mentioned the success of the reorganization is also dependent upon changes made in foreign policy, public diplomacy, border and transportation security,

and national preparedness. Effective implementation is reliant on legislation, executive order and a willingness to maintain a consistent strategy in each of these areas. Is there risk in transition? Absolutely. Governor Kean, chairman of the 9/11 Commission, acknowledged as much in his report. He warned, however, that there is even more risk in doing nothing. We cannot afford to continue with the status quo, we must act now.

Ultimately, I want to do what I wasn't able to do on September 11th. I want protect my children and keep them safe. I can't bring my son Brad back but I can in his memory push for a safer America. When critical reforms are implemented to make our country safer I'll know that neither Brad's life, nor the lives of nearly 3,000 others who perished on September 11th were lost in vain.

As a result of research into the horrific circumstances of my son's death, I came to realize that our country was unprepared for the threat of terrorism, despite forewarning. I now recognize that I cannot just be an observer but have an obligation and responsibility as an American citizen to be educated and aware of the larger issues that impact the safety of my family and friends. I encourage all Americans to read the 9/11 Commission report and to contact their elected officials and to urge them to act expeditiously in a non-partisan fashion to enact reform.

Again I want to thank you for this opportunity to express my views. My hope is that these hearings will lead to critical reforms. We now look to you, our elected officials for leadership, courage and the fortitude to embrace the recommendations. The safety of our families, our communities and our country rests in your hands.

Thank you.

