TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
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It's a pleasure to be here this morning to talk about maritime security.

Chairwoman Collins – my Senate Security Sister – has been to the Port of Los Angeles twice in the last year-and-a-half to assess best practices and observe how various agencies and levels of government cooperate and coordinate.

She even buckled up in a Coast Guard helicopter to see the complex from the air. Now if I could only get her to go for a run on the beach…

But it was during our work on the intelligence reform bill in 2004 that Senator Collins, Senator Lieberman and I really bonded. It's great to be working with you again, and on an issue of such importance to homeland security.

If there is a silver lining to the recent Dubai Ports World debacle, it is that it roused Congress from a deep security slumber. Congress and the American people are now focused on the huge vulnerability of our seaports.

I applaud your leadership and initiative on this issue. You, and your partners Senators Patty Murray and Norm Coleman, have a terrific bill in the GreenLane Maritime Cargo Security Act.

My friend Dan Lungren and I used many of the ideas in your legislation in crafting our SAFE Port Act.

Let me share with you my worst port security nightmare – the one that really keeps me up at night.

Imagine for a moment an ordinary shipping container, labeled as furniture, which is loaded onto a freighter at the Port of Jakarta in Indonesia. Instantly, it joins thousands of other weathered cargo boxes bound for a West Coast destination. But tucked in among the hand carved tables and chairs is a small box, no larger than a carry-on suitcase. In it is a dirty bomb, undetectable in its lead shield.

Imagine that, three weeks later, this same container is off-loaded onto a dock at the Port of Los Angeles, the bomb is placed on a truck and detonated in downtown LA, rendering it uninhabitable for 30 years.

This is no hypothetical, no worst-case scenario. This is a real threat that Congress and the White House must address.

Last year, at the Port of Los Angeles, we had a glimpse of what's possible. On two occasions, sharp-eyed dockworkers spotted people emerging from cargo containers labeled "clothing."

As it turned out, these 51 stowaways – more than twice the number of terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 – were immigrants from China seeking a better life. But they could have been members of a terrorist cell intent on doing serious harm.

Why did these incidents happen despite the steps taken by the Homeland Security Department to improve supply chain security?

First, as others have said, we still do not really know what's in the box.

Second, the system used to determine whether or not a container poses a threat is flawed.

Third, many ports do not have the technology in place to screen containers for contraband or weapons of mass destruction.

And fourth, CBP and the Coast Guard do not have adequate personnel to examine containers and conduct inspections throughout the worldwide supply-chain and at US ports.

The legislation we are discussing today is strategic, comprehensive and badly needed. I am proud to be a part of this bipartisan, bicameral effort.

Port security must be layered and strategically structured to enhance safety without disrupting the flow of trade. Terrorists will seek asymmetries in our security network and look to strike where we are weakest.

It is impossible to hand search every container entering the country. Our bill would push out our borders and help prevent bad actors and hazardous materials from reaching American soil in the first place.

Central to success – on port security and the war on terrorism in general – is better intelligence and better technology. These two coordinates apply as much to immigration and border points of entry as they do to port security.

Timely, accurate information and intelligence is the major lynchpin to the battle on terrorism. We can lock the front and back doors to terrorists, but we can be assured they will try to find a side door.

Higher fences are not the answer: experience shows that those intent on entering will find a way. But if we "know" the person or item to look for, we can use resources to keep them out – or find them in our midst. Better intelligence is the key to container security and border security.

Some good maritime security measures have been introduced in Congress since 9/11, but they have languished.

Now, I believe Congress is appropriately focused. The House Homeland Security Committee held a final hearing on our SAFE Port Act just yesterday and it will be marked up before the end of the month.

To my friends here who are familiar with the workings of the House, this timeline is nothing short of a legislative miracle.

But time is of the essence. The terrorists aren't waiting on the legislative schedule.

Thank you very much for inviting me here today.