

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

“Homeland Security: The Next Five Years”

September 12, 2006

As our nation remembers the shock and loss of the attacks on our country five years ago, the Committee will look ahead to assess the homeland security challenges the next five years will bring. Our expert witnesses, from the very top of the Department of Homeland Security to the front lines, will provide valuable insight into these challenges.

The morning of September 11th, 2001, was one of uncommon brilliance here in the United States. In the blink of an eye, it was transformed into one of unthinkable horror. Two thousand nine hundred ninety-six innocent men, women, and children perished. Two of our major cities were under

assault, two centers of our economic and military power were in flames, as was a field in Pennsylvania. To many, it seemed a new kind of war had begun.

If we had had the discussion we are having today five years before 9/11, it would have been clear that those attacks were not the opening salvo of a new war, but the foreseeable escalation of a war that had long been underway. 1996 was the year that Ramzi Yousef, while awaiting trial for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, was convicted of a conspiracy to plant bombs aboard a number of US airliners and of placing the bomb that exploded on a Philippine airliner the previous year. 1996 was the year of the truck bomb attack on Khobar Towers, an attack that specifically targeted U.S. military personnel. And 1996 was the year Osama bin Laden relocated from Sudan to Afghanistan, established a new base of operations under the protection of the Taliban, and declared war on the United States. The terrorist strategy was evolving

to direct and massive attacks on high-profile American targets, but we failed to see it. We failed to perceive that these seemingly isolated events were tied together.

One of the most striking findings of the 9/11 Commission was that the September 11th attacks were made possible by a “failure of imagination.” While commercial jets had long been a target of terrorists, the conventional wisdom was that they would be targeted in two ways: to hijack for hostages, or to blow up in mid-air. To envision airliners being hijacked to use as missiles would have taken some imagination, but it was not unimaginable. How different things might be today – five years after September 11th, 2001 -- if our imagination had been fully engaged five years before.

The fundamental obligation of government is to protect its citizens. Today, we will explore a number of questions about how government can better protect its citizens. To

answer these questions, we must first seek to identify the threats we face.

Terrorism constantly evolves. As the devastating attacks in Madrid, Bali, Beslan, London, and in Israel prove, terrorists will strike wherever opportunity allows and wherever innocent people are the most vulnerable. The terrorists' resourcefulness, cunning, and patience are exceeded only by their cruelty.

The recent arrests in Canada and Miami, the attacks on the London subway, and the thwarted airliner plot in Britain have made clear that terrorism masterminds no longer have to rely upon operatives imported from abroad to infiltrate target nations and carry out attacks. The emerging threat appears to be from "home-grown" terrorists, much harder to detect and not deterred by increased security at our borders.

Whether the target we seek to protect is a cargo port, a chemical plant, a public water supply, the electric grid, or information-technology networks, it does not take a stretch of the imagination to see that an attack could come from within just as easily, perhaps even more easily, than from abroad. The John Walker Lindh case demonstrates that the most extreme ideology can take root even among those who enjoy the most privileged circumstances. As the details of the British airliner plot emerge, it becomes evident that “home-grown” terrorists, whether working in conjunction with masterminds overseas or on their own, can be every bit as sophisticated and dangerous as the imported terrorists who attacked us on 9/11.

I am particularly concerned by the extent to which this infection is spread within our state and federal prisons. The Committee will hold a hearing on prison radicalization later this month. Richard Reid – the infamous “shoe-bomber” – was indoctrinated into Islamic extremism while in prison. An

American, Kevin James, now awaiting trial, founded an organization based upon his radical interpretation of Islam while in prison in California. The “new face” of terrorism – born and raised in America -- has been exposed.

As the terrorist tactics evolve, the overall objective remains the same – to cause maximum loss of innocent lives, to damage our economy, and to defeat our resolve. As they adapt to our strengthened defenses, the terrorists continue to pursue ever more spectacular and devastating attacks. Indeed, one of our witnesses today believes that terrorists are committed to carrying out a chemical, biological, or nuclear attack against our nation.

In addition to identifying the most likely threats, we must constantly assess and improve our efforts to counter them.

Our efforts during the last five years have been substantial. We closed the gap between law enforcement and intelligence that the terrorists exploited on 9/11. We created the Department of Homeland Security to provide a unifying core to the federal effort of preventing and responding to terrorist attacks. We have made investments in training and equipping first responders throughout the nation. We have strengthened our borders with additional personnel and improved technology. We brought about the most comprehensive restructuring of our intelligence community in more than a half century so that the trail of “dots” terrorists leave behind as they plan, train, and organize will never again be left unconnected.

These efforts, though, do not describe a task accomplished, but one underway. Each remains a work in progress. The emerging threats compel us to ask the hard

questions about how well what we have done in the past prepares us for the future.

Among the questions I intend to explore today are:

- **How can we confront the challenge of home-grown terrorists? What resources do state and local law-enforcement need to meet it? How can we work with the American Muslim community to prevent the radicalization of our own citizens?**
- **What are our greatest vulnerabilities to a chemical, biological, or nuclear attack, and how can they be mitigated?**
- **How can we continue to improve the effectiveness of our intelligence-gathering capabilities against terrorists as we continue to protect the civil liberties of the American people?**

- **How can we accelerate the development of a common culture within DHS that is so essential to its complex mission? How can DHS work more effectively with its state and local counterparts in detecting, preventing, and responding to acts of terrorism?**
- **What is the role of the private sector – the business community, health, education and other institutions, and the public -- in strengthening our defenses against terrorism?**
- **Although aviation security has been greatly improved, have we neglected the security of other forms of mass transportation?**
- **How can we better use our technological edge? On 9/11, and again during Hurricane Katrina, we saw the tragic results of incompatible communications equipment among our first responders. Should interoperable communications be a**

national priority? What other technologies can we better employ to protect such diverse targets as agriculture, industry, transportation, and information networks?

From the perspective of the past and present, we must imagine the future. September 11th, 2001, was a day of profound loss, but it also was a day of inspiring courage. The first responders and ordinary citizens who rushed into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon to save others, the brave souls aboard Flight 93 who gave their lives so that others might live, remind us of the greatest asset we bring to bear against this challenge – the spirit of the American people. We can best honor this spirit by demonstrating the resolve and the imagination to meet this ever-evolving challenge.