

Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



Homeland
Security

April 25, 2009

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Department of Homeland Security's recent risk assessment entitled, "Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment." This intelligence product was released earlier this month to our State, local and tribal partners. I appreciate the questions you raised about the assessment, and I am happy to respond.

As you know, the Department of Homeland Security was created in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Preventing future attacks on the homeland, whether by foreign or homegrown terrorists, remains the Department's number one priority. To accomplish this mission, the Department must share accurate, actionable, and timely threat-related information with our State, local and tribal partners so they can take appropriate action to protect their communities.

The assessment at issue was produced by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) in the regular course of the Department's information sharing work. Such assessments provide a vital service to state, local, and tribal authorities who often rely on DHS for intelligence and analytical support.

I fully appreciate the concerns raised by you and others about this particular assessment. I&A, as part of its analysis work, does not focus on individuals or groups solely based on their First Amendment-protected associations, beliefs, or speech. Instead, I&A targets criminal behavior that poses a threat to the nation.

Regarding your specific concerns, it's clear that the message in the assessment could have been made more directly and succinctly, and that there was a breakdown in the clearance process before its distribution. I want you to know that we have initiated new controls to ensure that there is more internal review of these products. The level of consultation between I&A and the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties was inadequate in this process. I am particularly concerned that issues raised by the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties were not resolved prior to the assessment's release. That

The Honorable Bennie Thompson
Page 2

will not happen in the future.

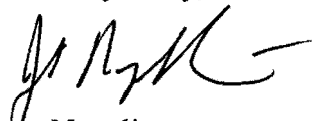
With this reinvigorated privacy and civil liberties process in place, the Department will continue to assess the risks posed by individuals and groups who engage in criminal or violent criminal activity that endangers the homeland, regardless of their ideology.

Those threats are real. The recent addition of the first American to the FBI's list of Most Wanted Terrorists for his role in a string of corporate bombings in California; the arrests in 2007 of citizens who were plotting an attack on Fort Dix; the arrest of a white supremacist in 2002 who had stockpiled enough sodium cyanide in his east Texas home to kill everyone inside a 30,000 square-foot building; and the Oklahoma City bombing are just a few examples of the dangers we face. The Department has a responsibility to prevent these types of attacks. It also has a responsibility to inform our state, local and tribal partners about illegal activity that may be a precursor to terrorism and other violent crime.

The April I&A assessment was intended to provide situational awareness of just these kinds of threats. In response to your request, I have directed my staff to provide information to the Committee about I&A's production and dissemination process, the lack of internal review, and the steps I will be taking to fix the problem.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns with me. I look forward to a successful and productive partnership with the Committee on Homeland Security, and I encourage you to call me if you have any additional concerns.

Yours Very Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Napolitano', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Janet Napolitano