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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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First public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

Statement of Mayor Michael Bloomberg to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States March 31, 2003

Governor Kean and members of the commission: Welcome to New York City.

Your commission has a broad mandate: To look at the reasons why 9/11 happened; to consider the steps the federal government should take to make sure attacks like that don't occur again; and to propose the measures that should be taken now to prepare us to respond to future terrorist incidents.

Much of your work will focus on such important questions as: How did terrorists get into the country? What should we do to make our borders safe? How were the terrorists allowed to learn to fly planes in our own country? How on

Current News

The Commission has released its final report. [\[more\]](#)

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Commission Members

Thomas H. Kean
Chair

Lee H. Hamilton
Vice Chair

earth could they get by the airport security with the obviously unenforced and ineffective federal regulations? And how can we stop other acts of terrorism in the future?

These are the issues for your commission. I want to focus on different, but also important, issues. I will describe our City government's reaction to the attack on the World Trade Center, including: our emergency response that day; our recovery effort in the days and months immediately afterward; and what we have done since in the arenas of counter-terrorism and preparedness.

Simply put, the terrorist attack on 9/11 was one of the darkest days in New York's history. It took the lives of 2,700 of our loved ones, friends and colleagues, including more than 360 valiant city firefighters, police officers and emergency workers. It revealed our vulnerability to murderous plots formulated half a world away. It shattered forever any illusion that our vast ocean boundaries can protect us.

But out of the devastation came one of our finest hours, defined by the heroism of those who rushed in the buildings to save others, the selflessness of New Yorkers who supported the recovery through acts as simple as lining up on West Street to say "thank you" to our emergency workers, and the resilience of New Yorkers, who refused to stop living their lives in the difficult days, weeks and months that followed the attack.

New York City has learned and continues to learn the lessons of 9/11. Today, I want to underscore the need for an effective and ongoing counter-terrorism partnership with the Federal government.

Police Commissioner Ray Kelly and Fire Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta are with me today. They will make statements following my

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testimony, and are prepared to answer your questions.

As you know, I was not the Mayor on 9/11; our Administration took office the following January. But the effects of 9/11 have been a major focus of our Administration over the last 15 months. We have examined the city's response to 9/11 thoroughly-and I can tell you that it was swift, massive, heroic and extraordinarily effective.

Within ten minutes of the first attack at 8:46 a. m., 50% of the police department's special operations units were deployed and were either at or on their way to World Trade Center. By 9:00 a.m., before the second plane even hit, both the Fire Department and our Emergency Medical Services had command posts on the scene directing rescue operations. By 9:10 a.m., less than a half-hour after the first tower was struck, 100% of the Fire Department's rescue and high-rise units had been ordered into action.

Police officers immediately secured the perimeter around the World Trade Center and Police Emergency Services Units entered the towers to assist in evacuations. Department of Health officials started considering public health effects and began contacting area hospitals to establish procedures for accepting the heavy influx of injured people that was anticipated. Sadly, those numbers did not materialize-I say sadly, because instead of the influx of injured New Yorkers, we experienced massive fatalities.

The professionalism of our rescue efforts, and the bravery of those who carried them out, is encapsulated in one statistic: some 25,000 people were safely evacuated from the World Trade Center that morning-the most successful urban emergency evacuation in modern history.

After the towers collapsed, the City's response was just as exemplary. Department of

Sanitation officials at the recently closed Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island, knowing they had heavy lifting and hauling equipment at hand, immediately made plans to send that equipment into Manhattan. Officials of the City's Department of Design and Construction, or DDC, acted with equal dispatch, obtaining equipment from some of the city's major construction firms. Despite the fact that its command center was destroyed in the attack, the City's Office of Emergency Management-OEM-established a temporary command post. By the evening of September 11th, lights lit up the entire site while the search for survivors went on.

Firefighters worked day and night to extinguish fires that burned beneath the rubble for months. The Department of Design and Construction, along with the Fire Department and the Office of Emergency Management, spearheaded inter-agency coordination among city agencies and with Federal and State agencies and private organizations.

In the first five days alone, almost 3,000 truckloads of debris were removed. Over the next seven months, an average of more than 7,000 tons of debris per day was taken from the site. Barging operations were established at Hudson River Piers 25 and 26 to transport debris from Manhattan to the Fresh Kills Landfill, which was re-opened to accommodate the enormous tonnage of material.

The recovery proceeded in a manner that made the search for human remains the highest priority. Work came to a halt any time it appeared such a discovery might be made. To date, the remains of 1,481 victims of the attack have been identified by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, an office that has led the nation in its use of state-of-the-art DNA identification technology.

The clearing of the site, which was initially

expected to take years, instead took eight months. The work was not only accomplished much faster than expected, but done under-budget, without a single loss of life, and with an injury rate far less than at an ordinary construction site, despite the unprecedented conditions in which the work was done.

In retrospect, there is little the City could have done on 9/11 to avoid the tremendous loss of life that occurred so quickly after the attacks. The failure of airport security doomed the 2800 poor souls who are no longer with us. However, since then we have taken it upon ourselves to learn everything possible from this tragedy.

Shortly after 9/11, the consulting firm of McKinsey & Co. agreed to study, on a pro bono basis, the response of the police and fire departments to the attack on the World Trade Center and to make recommendations for the future. These extremely valuable consultant studies complemented studies already underway in both these departments. And many of the consultants' recommendations were already in effect or were being implemented when their final reports were issued.

For example, at the NYPD, one of Commissioner Kelly's first acts was to establish a counter-terrorism bureau and expand the department's intelligence division. Protective and other equipment issued to officers responding to possible terrorist incidents also was upgraded. McKinsey & Co. also recommended that the NYPD create a comprehensive disaster response plan with the means to effectuate it-measures that have been carried out.

The McKinsey report concerning the FDNY was eloquent in its praise of the heroism and sacrifice of our firefighters. It also focused on four principal areas: operational preparedness; planning and management; communications technology; and the provision of counseling and support services to members of the department

and their families. Since its release, the Fire Department also has appointed a terrorism advisory taskforce headed by former CIA director James Woolsey. Perhaps the most encouraging McKinsey finding was that while the city's massive response was taking place, the rest of the city remained protected-with response time to emergencies elsewhere in the five boroughs barely impacted.

Other key agencies have also responded to the lessons of 9/11. The Department of Health has enhanced its bio-terrorism surveillance, developed a web-based system to communicate with medical providers in our city, and is building a state-of-the-art bio-terrorism laboratory. Our Office of Emergency Management has an interim headquarters, and is in the process of building a new permanent home. It has also coordinated a series of inter-agency preparedness exercises, which have guided our city's response to the increased security needs occasioned by the current war in Iraq.

New York City, which unfortunately is one of, if not the, primary potential targets of a terrorist attack, must be prepared both to prevent those attacks and to respond quickly and effectively if they occur.

My administration is committed to doing just that. We have developed an extraordinarily system to guard and protect this City, and every day we are making those systems even more effective. We are developing the most sophisticated systems possible both to prevent terrorism and respond to it.

Some ten days ago, I met with President Bush and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge to brief them on the counter-terrorism measures the city has taken because of the war in Iraq, known as Operation Atlas. Secretary Ridge later said "there is no city in this country that does a

better job of working across the board to prevent terrorism than the City of New York.”

After 9/11, President Bush pledged \$20 billion in Federal rebuilding assistance to New York City- and he has been as good as his word. We also have benefited from bi-partisan support in both Houses of Congress on this matter.

But we need additional help from the Federal government to meet the high costs of homeland security. New York City is the nation’s financial capital and its communications nerve center. Protection for New York is protection of the nation.

And the key to our City’s ability to respond to any future terrorist attacks is funding. I am sure you are aware of the City’s fiscal plight. We face a multi-billion dollar budget gap for the fiscal year beginning July 1st. Much of that deficit is the result of the increased expenses-and decreased economic activity-created by 9/11 and its aftermath.

I urge the Commission, in the most emphatic form possible, to recommend to Congress that it appropriate sufficient monies earmarked to the cities most vulnerable to attack, to help us defray the extraordinary costs of protecting our citizens. Specifically, we have requested additional funds for counter-terrorism training, equipment and to cover the costs of our massive security operations around the city in the supplemental appropriation the Administration sent to Congress last week.

Homeland Security funds should be allocated on the basis of threat analysis and risk. Any other formula defies logic and makes a mockery of the country’s counter-terrorism efforts. New York City has been targeted four times by terrorists, and the federal government cannot ignore our symbolic value, recent history and common sense as it works to increase homeland security.

To argue most other cities have comparable threats is ridiculous. New York is estimated to get \$11 million out of \$566 million from the last Homeland Security distribution. At some point, politics has to give way to practicality. If we distributed monies for the military this way, our troops in Iraq would have bows and arrows. I want to close with some comments on another problem that deserves your attention, and that of our policy makers. It is how to deal with the massive destruction and personal injuries that can result from a terrorist attack.

New York's response to 9/11 was truly extraordinary. Within hours of the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings, the City government and private companies had equipment and personnel at Ground Zero to undertake the massive recovery and debris removal operations that were necessary. The City and these contractors stayed there till the end, and did so selflessly, without a thought to the consequences.

However, in the real world there are consequences, and one of those is lawsuits. The City and the private contracting community are now aware of the risks we took on without the benefit of federal protection to cover our operations. It took over a year -- and a special act of Congress -- for any significant insurance to become available to protect the City and private contractors from such lawsuits arising from the clean-up operation, and the insurance provided does not in fact cover the amounts claimed in the lawsuits.

Personal injury claims regarding alleged long-term health damage could bankrupt our city over the next 20 years. Congress must give us retrospective indemnification, or the drag on the national economy will ruin opportunity throughout all 50 states.

Knowing what we know now, it is imperative that a federal indemnification plan be enacted

that would insure municipalities and private contractors, so that in the future, when we respond to a terrorist attack, we will be protected against the inevitable lawsuits. The attacks on 9/11 were attacks on the United States, not just the City of New York. We cannot afford the substantial risk that, in the wake of another terrorist attack, a municipality or state will feel it has to wait for the Army Corps of Engineers to do the necessary work, or private companies will feel they have to refuse to provide assistance until and unless a statute is passed giving protection.

Therefore the Commission should urge Congress to enact a special indemnification or insurance program for governmental entities and their contractors who respond to such an attack, to assure that FEMA can and will fund significant, immediate insurance coverage to such governments and contractors. Without Congressional action, the nation will be unprepared to respond to the destruction created by any future terrorist attacks.

Despite their extraordinarily busy schedules, and the work they are doing right now to meet the heightened security concerns accompanying the war in Iraq, Commissioners Kelly and Scoppetta are here to address the Commission and answer any questions you may have.

Before turning over the floor to you, and them, I want to conclude with this thought:

You are charged with performing a great service to our nation. And we all want to do what we can to remember all those who perished on 9/11 and those who so selflessly toiled for the days, weeks and months thereafter. We must learn the lessons of that terrible day-and make sure that this city and other cities in our nation have the communications systems, the well-trained personnel, and the Federal assistance we need to prevent and respond to such attacks in the future.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States
The Commission closed on August 21, 2004. This site is archived.