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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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

Statement of Nancy Pelosi to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States May 22, 2003

Chairman Kean, Vice Chairman Hamilton, distinguished members of the Commission, it is a pleasure to appear before you this morning.

Since the horrific attacks of September 11th, the United States has had two primary goals. First, we must identify the individuals and groups responsible and bring them to justice.

Second, we must understand why and how - why the attacks were not prevented, and how we can prevent future attacks.

Families of victims have told me that simply hearing a plane overhead fills them with terror.

Current News

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

The Chair and Vice Chair have released a statement regarding the Commission's closing. [\[more\]](#)

The Commission closed August 21, 2004. [\[more\]](#)

Commission Members

Thomas H. Kean
Chair

Lee H. Hamilton
Vice Chair

If the Commission does its job well, I hope we can remove that fear.

Need for an Independent Commission

From the outset, I believed that a review of the events leading up to the attacks, including the government's response, and the larger issue of our nation's preparedness for terrorist attacks, needed to be comprehensive and conducted independently by individuals who could bring fresh thinking to the issues at hand.

Congressional investigations, no matter how thorough, would likely be restricted primarily to the jurisdiction of the committee or committees involved.

Because the government would conduct such investigations, they would be unlikely to achieve the same degree of public acceptance as an independent inquiry.

I regret that such an inquiry did not begin sooner. Within weeks of the attacks, I offered legislation to establish an independent review to be conducted by people who would challenge conventional wisdom and who had wide perspective and broad experience in dealing with complex problems.

Unfortunately, agreement could not be reached on how much power to give the review, and the commission I proposed was defeated on the House floor.

I am pleased, however, that through the persistence of a member of this commission, former Congressman Tim Roemer, as well as that of Senators McCain and Lieberman, this body was established and has begun its critical work.

Congressional Contributions to Date

Richard Ben-Veniste
Fred F. Fielding
Jamie S. Gorelick
Slade Gorton
Bob Kerrey
John F. Lehman
Timothy J. Roemer
James R. Thompson

Commission Staff

Philip D. Zelikow
Executive Director

Chris Kojm
Deputy Executive Director

Daniel Marcus
General Counsel

Fortunately, the time between the idea for this commission and its creation was by no means lost.

The inquiry undertaken by the House Intelligence Committee's subcommittee on terrorism and the nearly year-long joint investigation by the House and Senate's intelligence committees both answered questions about the nation's state of preparedness and also identified areas in which further work is necessary.

I am aware that the committees are following up in those areas, even as they work toward the release of a declassified version of the report. I am confident that the work of these inquiries has been, and will continue to be, of assistance to this commission.

Beyond the Intelligence Community

These congressional reviews were necessary, and they have produced important records that enhance our understanding of what happened on September 11 and why. At the same time, these reviews do not tell the whole story.

Both reviews were focused on the work of the intelligence community, rather than the performance of the federal government as a whole, both prior to and after the devastating attacks.

Whatever failures occurred in the intelligence agencies may have been matched in seriousness by failures in other agencies. This is not to excuse either the intelligence community specifically, or the federal government generally.

Rather, it is to say that the greatest service this commission can perform is to provide a clear picture of how the federal government as a whole was, or was not, working against

terrorism before September 11th, how the pieces fit, or did not fit, and the consequences of the government's performance.

For example, the joint congressional inquiry on which I served did not have access to records of the National Security Council.

I believe that a review of those records would be helpful to a thorough understanding of decisions made by the Bush Administration on terrorism matters and I hope this commission is successful in obtaining access to them.

Since the attacks, steps have been taken to realign federal agencies and change responsibilities - the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the Terrorism Threat Integration Center being among the most notable.

These may turn out to be worthwhile actions.

However, my concern has been that these entities were instinctive responses to a general perception that things were not right, rather than as the result of an exhaustive inquiry across the government with specific findings and specific recommendations for change.

This is the critical role your commission can and must play.

The Role of Congressional Oversight

The activities of the Congress before September 11th are appropriate areas of inquiry and, to this point, have not been examined closely. There has been concern that, prior to the attacks, responsibility for oversight of homeland security issues had been too diffused within Congress.

In the House, a select committee and a separate Appropriations subcommittee have been created

to address that concern. It is still too early for either of these entities to have produced a record on which to basis judgments.

Nevertheless, I expect that a separate Appropriations subcommittee will ensure that the homeland security programs that are not funded through subcommittees such as defense or transportation will receive the resources they need.

Adequate funding for homeland security presumes that it is accorded a high priority in budget submissions.

But I am sorry to say that this has not been the case. For example, the Coast Guard maintains it needs \$6.6 billion over the next 10 years for port security and related activities.

Yet the Bush Administration has requested only \$500 million thus far, despite the enactment of legislation that underscores the critical needs in this area.

Unfortunately, resources that Congress devotes to any given agency or effort have been less reflective of the organization of congressional committees, and more reflective of the importance they are given by the Bush Administration.

Although it is too early to judge what impact the changes already made in the House will have on the oversight process, I do not believe that additional changes are necessary at this point.

You may reach a different conclusion, and, if you do, I will be interested in your thinking. My belief, however, is that the mechanisms are in place to conduct effective oversight and that it is up to congressional leaders to make sure those mechanisms are employed vigorously.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to reiterate the enormous significance I attach to your efforts, and the high hopes I have for your success. The tragedy of September 11th is so immense that as we go forward to meet the challenges, we will be walking on sacred ground.

Any review of this tragedy must therefore be conducted in a way that reflects the enormity of the losses the nation suffered, and the magnitude of the sacrifices endured by the families of the victims.

Your work will be essential in providing answers about why government agencies collectively did not do better in advance of September 11th, and how they can improve their performance in the future.

Along with the American people, especially the families and friends of those we lost, I eagerly await the results of your deliberations.

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