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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 Harry Waizer to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States March 31, 2003**

Governor Kean, members of the Commission, thank you for asking me to speak before you today. My experience of 9/11 differs from yours and that of the general public. As this nation and much of the world watched in shock and horror on 9/11, as events unfolded at the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon and in the air over the farmlands of Pennsylvania, I was otherwise engaged, battling for my life. If hearing my personal story can help this Commission fulfill its important task, I will gladly tell it.

On September 11, at approximately 8:46 in the morning, I was in an elevator, somewhere between the 78th and 101st floor, in tower 1 of the World Trade Center. I had left my wife,

### **Current News**

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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**

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Thomas H. Kean  
*Chair*

Lee H. Hamilton  
*Vice Chair*

Karen, and our three children, Katie then age 13, Joshua age 12 and Jodi age 10 at about 7:15 that morning and was on my way to my offices on the 104th floor, where I was employed as Vice President and Tax Counsel in charge of national and international tax matters for Cantor Fitzgerald.

The elevator was ascending when, suddenly, I felt it rocked by an explosion, and then felt it plummeting. Orange, streaming sparks were apparent through the gaps in the doors at the sides of the elevator as the elevator scraped the walls of the shaft. The elevator burst into flame. I began to beat at the flames, burning my hands, arms and legs in the process. The flames went out, but I was hit in the face and neck by a separate fireball that came through the gap in the side of the elevator doors. The elevator came to a stop on the 78th floor, the doors opened, and I jumped out.

I began the long walk down 78 flights in the fire stairwell. I walked focused on my single mission; to get to the street and find an ambulance. I knew I was seriously hurt. The stairwell was filled with people calmly walking down, with no apparent sense of the magnitude of what had just occurred. I was shouting out to people in the stairwell, telling them I was burned, asking them to step aside so that I could get down more quickly. Faces turned toward me, sometimes with apparent annoyance at this intrusion on the orderly evacuation process. I saw the look on many of those faces turn to sympathy or horror as they saw me. At one point I noticed a large flap of skin hanging off my arm. I did not look any further.

Somewhere on the way down, I believe around the 50th floor, I met a man who appeared to be either a firefighter or Emergency Medical Technician walking up. He stopped, turned around, and walked in front of me, leading me down. We made it to the lobby and walked 2

Richard Ben-Veniste  
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Philip D. Zelikow  
*Executive Director*

Chris Kojm  
*Deputy Executive Director*

Daniel Marcus  
*General Counsel*

blocks to find an empty ambulance, which took me to the Burn Center at New York Presbyterian Hospital. I stayed conscious only long enough to give them my name and my wife's phone number.

I have no memories after that until some 6 or 7 weeks later; I spent that period in a state of induced coma, but I can offer a second hand account of some of the more important personal events. I was triaged at the hospital, where they took my clothes, wallet, watch and glasses, none of which I ever saw again. They began to cut off my wedding band from my badly burned fingers, but a sympathetic nurse used an entire jar of lubricant to remove it intact and saved it for my wife. Karen has worn that ring on a chain around her neck since then, saving it for the day when I can wear it on my finger again.

As the world watched with horror as the events of that morning unfolded, Karen began receiving phone calls from friends and relatives. She tried to call me and then waited, with fading hope, for me to call her. Friends and family gathered at my home to offer her hope and, if the worst happened, comfort. My two older children, having heard of the attack called home and were allowed to come home. My 10 year old daughter remained in school, unaware. At 12:30 the nurse was finally able to call Karen, who took the call in our kitchen and passed the news on to the others that I was alive. Screams and tears of joy filled the room. But as one nightmare ended for her, another was to begin.

Karen had no idea how seriously I had been injured. She was unable to reach me at the hospital until almost 8 o'clock that evening. When Karen first saw me that night, I was not recognizable. My head was swollen almost to basketball size, the rest of my body had similarly swelled and my features were either covered by bandages or so blackened and distorted as to be unidentifiable. It was only the ring that gave her any comfort that the swollen,

misshapen body lying in that hospital bed was in fact her husband. The doctors explained to Karen the nature and severity of my injuries. I was particularly at risk because the fireball in my face had seared my windpipe and lungs and I had inhaled a large amount of jet fuel, leaving me particularly prone to life threatening infections. I have since been told that my chances of survival at that moment were roughly five percent.

That night began a 7 week roller coaster ride for Karen, friends and family. I would appear to be recovering one day and be diagnosed with a highly dangerous infection the next. I underwent multiple surgeries to graft new skin on my hands, arms, face and neck, suffered a blood clot, a seizure, a partial lung collapse and a series of blood and lung infections. Karen's mother moved up from Delaware into our home to take care of our three children. Members of our local and synagogue communities delivered dinner to our home and drove our children to their various activities. Friends and family member accompanied Karen to the hospital every day. Mine was not just a personal struggle, it was shared by family and community.

After five months of hospitalization, multiple surgeries, a year and a half, and counting, of painful, sometimes grueling, therapy, I am here today to bear witness. My injuries have left me with lung damage, chronic pain in my right elbow, my left knee and my back, damage to my vocal cords and the prognosis for the nerve and tendon damage in my left hand is still uncertain. But I can enjoy various activities, play with my children, and enjoy my time spent with my wife, with friends and family. I am one of the handful of lucky ones. Just blocks away from here lay the unrecovered remains of many friends and colleagues, some dear friends. They can no longer speak for themselves and I am left with the unchosen, unhappy task of trying to speak for them. I do this with no particular

moral authority, but neither I nor they have a choice.

I have no rage about what happened on 9/11, only a deep sadness for the many innocent, worthy lives lost and the loved ones who lost so much that day. There have always been madmen, perhaps there always will be. They must be stopped, but with the cold detachment reserved by a surgeon for removing a cancer. They are not worthy of my rage. Neither do I feel anger at those who arguably could have foreseen, and thereby prevented, the tragedies. If there were mistakes, they were the mistakes of complacency, a complacency in which we all shared.

This commission can not turn back the hands of time. There is nothing to be gained by asserting blame, by pointing fingers. The dead will remain dead despite this commission's best efforts and intentions. But it is my hope that this commission can learn and teach us from its scrutiny of the past, and if the findings of this commission can prevent even one future 9/11, if they can forestall even one plan of Osama bin Laden, prevent even one more act of madness and horror, I and the rest of this nation will owe the commission our gratitude, and I will be proud of the small part I was allowed to play today.

I do have one concern I would like to voice. I have no political experience, but I do have experience as an informed citizen. It tells me that commissions such as this are usually formed by men and women of good will, have committed, intelligent members and staff possessed of good will, and eventually produce reports that are read carefully and seriously by others of good will. Yet the findings of such commissions are often ignored in the end. Compassion and concern are often spread thin, and other important issues become priorities after the glare of the public spotlight fades. My fear is that the work of this commission will

have a similar fate. My hope is that by speaking to you today, by putting a human face on the tragedy that was 9/11, by attempting to speak, however inadequately, for those who no longer have voices, I can help further the cause of this commission and this nation, to help build a safer, more secure tomorrow for all of us, and that doing so will help bring peace for us and our children.

Thank you.

*Mr. Harry Waizer currently resides in Westchester County, New York. Mr. Waizer was a Partner, Vice President and Tax Counsel for Cantor Fitzgerald, a financial services company with about 2,000 employees worldwide. Of those, approximately 1,000 worked in New York. Mr. Waizer worked for Cantor Fitzgerald for five years, in the 104th floor of the World Trade Center Tower One.*

*On the morning of September 11, 2001 Mr. Waizer was in an elevator, somewhere between the 78th and 101st floors, in Tower One. He received critical burns and severe lung damage in the WTC attack. After five months of hospitalization, multiple surgeries, and over a year and a half of painful, sometimes grueling, therapy, his recovery continues to progress. His injuries have left him with chronic pain in his right elbow, left knee and back, and the prognosis for nerve and tendon damage in his left hand is still uncertain. But through it all his will has remained strong, and today can enjoy various activities, such as playing with his children, Katie, Joshua, and Jodi, and enjoying time spent with his wife Karen, friends and family.*

*Mr. Waizer received his B.S. in Accounting from Brooklyn College in 1976. He qualified as a New York State CPA in 1978. He also graduated cum laude from Fordham Law School in 1982, where he was an editor of the Law Review.*

*In 1974 Mr. Waizer was employed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), New York City, as a Revenue Officer. He served the IRS as a Revenue Agent from 1975 to 1981. From 1982 to 1994, Mr. Waizer was an Associate in the law firm Debevoise & Plimpton. Prior to working for Cantor Fitzgerald, he served as Counsel in the law firm Friedman & Kaplan from 1995 to 1996.*

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States  
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