

Floor Statement of Senator Lieberman on Introduction of 9/11 Commission Implementation Act

September 7, 2004

Mr. President, shortly after 9/11, Senator McCain and I introduced legislation creating the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. We felt – and many other members agreed – that the nation needed to know as clearly and definitively as possible what had happened, why, and what could be done to prevent such heinous attacks in the future. In particular, the families of the 9/11 victims rightly demanded that we learn all we could from the tragedy that took their loved ones from them. In its 20-month existence, this outstanding panel brought a laser focus to its task. The Commission insisted on talking to the people and seeing the documents that could tell them the full story. Commissioners and their staff reviewed more than two and half *million* pages of documents, and spoke to more than 1,200 people in ten countries. They held 19 days of public hearings and took public testimony from 160 witnesses. They transcended partisan affiliation to work together for the people of this country. The result is not only a definitive account of what happened on September 11, but also a thoughtful and compelling analysis of why it happened and where we must go from here.

That is why, today, I join with my good friend Senator McCain once again – this time to introduce the “9/11 Commission Report Implementation Act of 2004.” We are joined in this effort by Senators Specter and Bayh. This legislation encompasses all 41 of the recommendations in the Commission’s Final Report. Some of those, involving calls to restructure the intelligence community, have already been the focus of extensive debate. Others, such as proposals to crack down on fraudulent identification documents or build new bridges to the Muslim world, have gotten less discussion. But they are all the product of the outstanding and diligent work of the Commission and therefore should command our attention. We did not attempt to pick and choose which should be considered, or to edit the Commission’s policy conclusions. Indeed, there are some areas where I have taken a different approach to concerns the Commission has raised. But the Commission’s recommendations should be our starting point, and I believe in many cases – perhaps most – they should be our ending point.

So just what does the Commission – and therefore this legislation – call for? The

Commission's Final Report depicts a nation that was woefully unprepared for the assault of September 11. As Chairman Thomas Kean and Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton wrote in the preface to the report, "[w]e learned that the institutions charged with protecting our borders, civil aviation, and national security did not understand how grave this threat could be, and did not adjust their policies, plans and practices to deter or defeat it." While there have been some improvements in our efforts to fight terrorism, we have only begun to do what must be done. As the Commission concludes, we need a new strategic vision to confront terrorism and a new unified effort to carry out that strategy. Such unity can only be achieved through a dramatic transformation of some of our key organizations and policies.

Reform of the nation's intelligence community is the first order of business. In recounting the lead-up to 9/11, the Commission painted a picture of some skilled, perceptive intelligence officials straining against the boundaries of either their own bureaucracy or the overall malfunctioning of the intelligence community. Pieces of the terrorist puzzle were scattered throughout the intelligence community and beyond, but never assembled in time to thwart the attack. The Commission has described how, in the course of its investigation, it would repeatedly ask, "Who was in charge before 9/11 and who is in charge today?" – only to be met with startled looks and non-answers.

This is unacceptable and why this legislation rightly creates a new National Intelligence Director to serve as head of the intelligence community and principal adviser to the President for national intelligence matters. The director will have strong budget, resource and personnel authority to shape priorities and break down turf barriers – far stronger than the current authorities exercised by the Director of Central Intelligence. This will create the capability and the accountability for someone to truly lead a unified intelligence effort that will, in turn, greatly benefit the specific fight against terrorism. .

To help guarantee the government-wide antiterrorism cooperation that did not exist pre-9/11, the legislation also creates a National Counter Terrorist Center, drawing on expertise from throughout the intelligence community. This center will serve as an analytic fusion center on terrorism, and will also have responsibility to develop operational plans for counter terror initiatives, and then to track and monitor the operations' implementation. As such, the center will build on the promise of the new multi-agency Terrorist Threat Integration Center it would

replace, but go beyond that model to create an even more robust center that combines analytical and operational capabilities.

As recommended by the Commission, the legislation also provides for the creation by the National Intelligence Director of a number of national intelligence centers focused on either specific topics like weapons of mass destruction or specific geographic areas such as the Middle East. These centers will bring together the most experienced intelligence experts from across the intelligence community on a given issue or region, and can be created or eliminated as needed, giving us the flexibility to hone in on evolving priorities.

I am pleased that these intelligence reform proposals have already been the focus of numerous hearings and these issues will be under active consideration in the Governmental Affairs Committee in the coming days. Chairman Collins and I are working on a committee bill to reform the intelligence process. The work on these two pieces of legislation has proceeded distinctly but collaboratively, and the work on each has informed and strengthened the other.

The intense debate over the Commission's recommendations on intelligence reform has somewhat obscured the sweeping proposals the Commission made in other areas – proposals on border and transportation security, identification documents, national preparedness and congressional oversight. Those proposals are included in this legislation as well and, as a result, we hope this introduction will jumpstart debate and consideration of these other vital reforms.

I will mention just a few of these proposals: a far-reaching information sharing network to promote sharing of intelligence and homeland security information throughout government; an integrated screening system to ensure adequate screening at the nation's entry points and to access transportation systems or critical infrastructure; new initiatives to thwart terrorist travel; measures to boost transportation security; and new outreach programs to the Muslim world.

Finally, as we look to the changes the Commission has urged for Executive Branch structures and programs, we must not neglect the Commission's call to reform our own structures. The Commission concluded that the intelligence committees of the House and Senate are not organized to provide strong leadership and oversight for intelligence and counterterrorism, and that jurisdiction over the Department of Homeland Security is woefully dispersed. This legislation incorporates their mandate that each chamber reform its rules to create

a more powerful intelligence committee or committees, and to consolidate oversight of the Department of Homeland Security in a single committee in each chamber.

Clearly, we have our work cut out for us. But the Commission has given us a clear roadmap – as well as a pressing moral imperative – to begin our efforts. I am honored to join my colleagues in presenting their recommendations to this body, and thank the Commissioners for their service to our country.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my entire statement be printed in the Record as if read.