

Opening Statement of Senator Jeffrey S. Chiesa
at the
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Hearing on
The Department of Homeland Security at 10 Years:
Examining Challenges and Achievements and Addressing Emerging Threats
September 11, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Coburn for convening this important hearing today. Your leadership of this committee is helping to keep our country safe and I know I speak for all Americans in expressing my appreciation for the outstanding job you are doing.

Twelve years ago, the United States confronted, really for the first time, the enormous challenge of protecting our country, our people, and our way of life from terrorists and others who would inflict on our country the sort of previously unimaginable destruction we suffered that day.

For the first time in decades, the United States was attacked on its own soil. No one in this room – indeed, no one who experienced the events of 9-11 – needs to be reminded of the shock, the pain, the fear, and the uncertainty that every American experienced.

The memories are indelibly etched on our minds and on our souls.

One common refrain during the days following 9-11 was that nothing would ever be the same again.

And there is no denying that in many ways, both large and small, our lives have changed.

Because of the very real threats we face, we have become vigilant in new ways. And that vigilance has come with a cost – both in terms of the money spent and in terms of the impact on our daily lives.

But it is also important to remember that this vigilance is, in no small measure, also the price of our liberty.

The overarching success of the policies, procedures, and institutions established in the weeks and months following the attacks on America are self-evident.

As Governor Ridge often noted, in fighting terrorism we have to succeed 100 percent of the time in our mission; the terrorists only have to succeed once.

And while they have not succeeded, we have.

That record, however impressive – and it is impressive – should not preclude us, from time to time, from evaluating the ongoing efforts our government is making to secure our country. We must be looking for ways in which we can improve the defense our country so that we can continue to be successful 100 percent of the time.

After all, every policy, every procedure, and every institution changes over time.

Sometimes the change comes about through careful study and consideration.

Other changes, however, can occur organically, in the form of “mission creep,” and those changes do not always contribute to the overall success of the goals we all share.

And just as we must evaluate the changes that have occurred over the past dozen years, we must also recognize the existence of bureaucratic inertia. The often-heard phrase “But we’ve always done it this way,” is an enemy of the vigilance we must continue to practice.

There’s no doubt that terrorists are continually adapting to the measures we put in place.

They are constantly probing to find the weak spots in our security. They look for the most vulnerable places to strike, bypassing the least vulnerable targets. That is why this hearing is so important.

Our witnesses have the experience and the knowledge to inform this committee about what has worked and what needs improvement. They can also help us evaluate the shifting nature of the threats we face.

I am looking forward to the testimony of our witnesses, each of whom has earned the respect and gratitude of this country for giving so much of themselves to ensure that we remain vigilant in the defense of our country and our liberty.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.