

Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper
The Department of Homeland Security at 10 Years: Examining Challenges and Achievements and
Addressing Emerging Threats
September 11, 2013

Today marks the twelfth anniversary of 9/11. It is a day for reflection – not only on all that we lost that day – but on the sense of unity that brought us closer together as a nation in the wake of a terrible tragedy. This anniversary also provides us with an important opportunity to think about all the efforts we have taken to secure our country since that fateful day, as well as the challenges that lie ahead.

With us today, we have a remarkable group of witnesses that will share their thoughts on what we have accomplished since 9/11 and the future of homeland security. I would like to thank each of them for being here today and for their valuable service to our country.

This year, the Department of Homeland Security turned ten years old. While I'm sure we can all agree that the Department can do a better job in certain areas, we should not forget about the remarkable progress that has been made in keeping Americans safer. There is no doubt, in my view, that we are safer today than we were ten years ago.

I'd like to take a few minutes to highlight some of the more significant accomplishments:

We've enhanced aviation security through a more risk-based, intelligence driven system that begins screening passengers against national security databases four days before they board an airplane;

We've improved our preparedness for and ability to respond to disasters, while cutting red tape at the federal level.

We saw the fruit of these efforts in the response following the Boston Marathon bombings and also the natural disasters that have struck us recently, including Hurricane Sandy;

We've increased the security of our nation's borders with historic levels of manpower and resources; and

We've built up cyber security capabilities to work with the private sector and federal government agencies in preparing for, responding to, and mitigating against, the ever growing number of cyber attacks.

“But is there still room for more improvement? You bet there is. As I like to say, “the road to improvement is always under construction.” One way the Department can improve is by doing a better job of preparing for tomorrow's threats -- today.

We do a good job at fighting the last war and preparing for the last type of attack, but to secure our homeland we must be better at anticipating the next type of attack. Ten years ago, for example, very few people were even talking about cybersecurity. Today, we can hardly go a day without reading about a cyber attack in the news.

To respond to the challenge of ever-changing threats, we need a Department of Homeland Security that is flexible and ready to adapt when necessary. And sometimes, we just need to use some common-sense. If a program is not working, we shouldn't just keep throwing good money after bad. Rather, we must work smarter with our limited resources and find ways to get even better results for less money.

That is why Dr. Coburn and I are holding this hearing and a series of others.

We are conducting a top to bottom review of the Department so that we can learn from instances where the Department succeeded and where it came up short. This information will help us focus our scarce resources on what works.

As the Committee conducts this review process, we will be looking to ensure that the Department is making smarter acquisition decisions, developing a stronger workforce, and improving its financial management systems. This review will also look at how we can strengthen the defenses of our homeland against very sophisticated and highly agile threats.

One of the most important things we can do to improve homeland security is to come together to pass cybersecurity legislation. The threat is too great, and the consequences of inaction are too severe, to do nothing. Passing a cybersecurity bill will not be easy. But, we have a shared responsibility – Democrat and Republican, House and Senate, government and industry -- to get this legislation into the end zone.

We already saw many of these different parties come together to pass comprehensive immigration reform in the Senate a few months ago.

I do not agree with everything that is in the bill, and I know that Dr. Coburn does not either. But I believe that it is vastly preferable to our current immigration system, the failings of which undermine both our national and economic security. It is my hope that the House will pass its own version of immigration reform so we can go to conference and pass this historic piece of legislation.

So as we remember 9/11 and discuss the challenges that lie ahead, we must seek to recapture that spirit of unity that prevailed twelve years ago if we are to succeed in making the Department of Homeland Security stronger over the next ten years. I look forward to working with our members, our witnesses, and the Administration to achieve this goal.