



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

**Defending the Nation Since 9/11:
Successful Reforms and Challenges Ahead at the Department of Homeland Security
Chairman Joe Lieberman
September 7, 2011**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning, the hearing will come to order. Thanks for being here. In four days, we will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the attacks of 9/11 and mourn anew for the nearly 3,000 lives that were lost that day at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and on Flight 93, which as we all know of course, crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. But we have already quite appropriately begun - and will continue through September 11th - a look back at September 11th to both understand with the clarity of hindsight what that day meant and to evaluate what our government and our people have done since that time.

There's no question that, although we knew it then, we can certainly look back and see now that on that one day we were drawn into a war, which is increasingly global. This is a war that is being fought by Violent Islamist Extremists against most of the rest of the world, including most of the Muslim world. That day, in my own opinion and with the clarity of hindsight, began that war, although Osama bin Laden declared war in 1998 and they had been attacking us for some period of time before then, including the World Trade Center.

But it really began that day. and in the days and months following 9/11/01, we in government set out with an urgent determination to reform the systems that had failed us. I think the more we knew about how September 11th happened, particular through the work of the 9/11 Commission, I came to the conclusion that, though we can never know with certainty, 9/11 was probably preventable.

As we look back at all we've done to respond to our failures on that day, I think if another group of terrorists attempted a similar attack on the United States today, we would prevent it. And that of course gives me great comfort and a sense of great gratitude for all that's been done by so many people in our government to make sure we are more secure than we were on 9/11/01.

We put into place measures that reorganized and reformed our government to prevent another attack on the U.S. I know there are some who are saying that we over reacted to 9/11/01, that it was not just a substantive overreaction, but an expensive overreaction. I don't agree. The most bottom line reality today is that, as we look back over the past 10 years, there has not been another mass casualty attack by Violent Islamist Extremists on the United States since 9/11. I don't think anybody would have predicted that on 9/12/01, but we can say that today, not because our enemies stopped trying, but because our defenses and intelligence have made us more secure. A couple of times we were just plane lucky, as in the glaring cases of the Detroit bomber on Christmas Day and the Times Square bomber, both of whose explosives just didn't go off. If they had, I think we'd be looking back with

a different sense of the past 10 years. But overall we have been spared another catastrophic terrorist attack like the one on 9/11 just not as a matter of luck, but because of a lot of things people did.

I'm very proud of the role members of this Committee have played in creating these new organizations. The first of course was the cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which we created to lead our efforts to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States. DHS has significantly contributed to our increased national safety. I'm grateful for the report GAO has issued today. Our Committee essentially agrees with it. It's a positive report on the work of the Department of Homeland Security. It points to some work yet to be done, and I think we'd all agree with that, including people at the Department. But the fact is ten years ago, no single agency and no single official were designated to lead the federal government's efforts to prevent terrorism, or for that matter to adequately marshal the resources of the federal government to respond to natural disasters. Today, there is clarity on who is in charge, and who should be coordinating to prepare, respond to and recover from disasters. And that makes a tremendous difference.

I want to thank Deputy Secretary Lute and Gene Dodaro who are both appearing before us today. I am heartened that the report GAO is issuing today concludes overall DHS has implemented most of its key missions and created a foundation that will allow the Department to move aggressively toward its full potential. We appreciate that very much and look forward to the testimony of our witnesses. I will submit the rest of my statement for the record.

Submitted for the Record:

Ten years ago, one of the government's critical weaknesses, as the 9/11 Commission pointed out, was its failure to share information. In the eight and a half years of its existence, DHS has sought to transform information sharing from a limited, need-to-know ethos to sharing across federal agencies and across jurisdictions, with state and local officials who are on the front lines in our fight against terrorism, and with our international partners. Today, there are over 70 fusion centers across the country where federal and state officials sit side-by-side gathering and analyzing information on potential threats together.

One of the areas where our government has made the most progress since 9-11 has been the security of our borders. Before the attacks, three separate cabinet departments were involved in screening individuals and goods coming into the country. And most of the time we didn't know a person intended to travel to the U.S. until they arrived at one of our airports or seaports. Today, we have unified these functions within DHS, and as a result of a number of new programs, we can begin screening and targeting people and goods well before they board an airplane or ship bound for the United States. I recognize that vulnerabilities remain, but it is important to recognize the significant gains that we have made.

Ten years ago, we had an emergency management agency that was simply not equipped to deal with catastrophic disasters, as we found out during Hurricane Katrina. Today, an expanded and strengthened Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is better prepared and has responded effectively to recent hurricanes, including Irene, which tore through the coastal regions of the Eastern seaboard last week – including my home state of Connecticut - where approximately 830,000 homes and businesses lost power at the height of the storm and the overall economic impact to the state is estimated at \$282 million.

Although DHS was created in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, part of its mission has always been to assist communities in responding to and recovering from disasters of all types – natural or man-made. FEMA has

played a significant role in the response to hurricane Irene, and in the weeks and months ahead, people throughout the eastern United States will continue to look to DHS for critical assistance as they work to recover from the devastation caused by major storms.

In the last ten years, we have also increased and substantially improved our screening of passengers and cargo on airplanes bound for or flying within the U.S. We have improved our rail and transit security and the security of our maritime ports. We have begun to implement measures to prevent and detect biological and other WMD attacks. We have better secured chemical plants. And we have ramped up protection of our critical infrastructure, particularly the cyber networks upon which that infrastructure depends. DHS has played an essential role in each of these developments.

The internal workings of the Department have also improved. Melding 200,000 employees and dozens of agencies with different cultures and management policies has not been an easy endeavor. But the Department is better integrated than it has ever been.

None of these achievements, however, mean that we are satisfied. We can still do better, and we must do better. The Department must continue to work every day for greater efficiencies and effectiveness, particularly given the budget climate we are now in.

Today, we are honored to have with us Jane Holl Lute, Department of Homeland Security Deputy Secretary, and Gene Dodaro, Comptroller General of the United States, to discuss the Department's track record over the years – its successes and the challenges yet to be met. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has issued a new report to stimulate and inform our discussion. I am heartened that the report concludes that overall DHS has implemented key missions and achieved many important goals, creating a foundation that will allow it to continue to mature and reach its full potential. We are grateful, as always, for GAO's deep and careful analysis.

I am particularly interested in our witnesses' thoughts about the budget cuts the Department will certainly face in the coming years. DHS has begun the task of streamlining: It is realizing hundreds of millions of dollars in savings through restrictions on budget components such as employee travel; and by ending ineffective or redundant programs, such as SBINet and the National Security Entry and Exit Registration System. I am concerned, however, that significant additional cuts to DHS's budget, as some have proposed, could reverse many of the homeland security gains that have been achieved since September 11, 2001.

Again, I thank GAO for its important and timely work represented by the report being issued today in conjunction with this hearing. And I especially thank the men and women of DHS for their tireless efforts to protect the American people against the threat of terrorism, respond to natural and manmade disasters, and carry out the Department's many other missions with professionalism, effect, and integrity.

Senator Collins?