

TESTIMONY

**Statement by
Norman R. Augustine
Regarding
S.1867**

**A Bill to Establish the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks
Upon the United States**

**Committee on Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC
February 7, 2002**

* * *

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you to share my views on "S.1867, a Bill to Establish a National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States." I should emphasize at the outset that the comments I will offer are entirely my own and that I am in no way representing any of the organizations with which I am affiliated.

Needless to say, the issue addressed by S.1867 is of the utmost national importance. It was my privilege to serve for several years on the Hart/Rudman Commission and having done so it unfortunately came as no great surprise that America would be subjected to attacks of the nature suffered on September 11, 2001. I say this not because of any specific evidence of impending tragedy, but rather as a derived conclusion from three general considerations. The first of these is that it has long been evident that a number of individuals and groups on this planet hold America in utter contempt and have been quite vocal in stating their hatred for all which we hold dear. Second, with the end of the Cold War, America's military's capability is such that it would seemingly be futile for such enemies to attack America's forces in a conventional battle on the land, on the sea, in the air or even in space. Third, in recent decades we have witnessed a fundamental change, largely brought about by unintended consequences of advancements in science and technology, whereby for the first time in history individuals or small groups can profoundly impact far larger groups in a very adverse manner. It is not possible for the former to exert control in this fashion . . . but it is possible for them to severely disrupt the stability enjoyed by the larger group. In short, for individuals or groups seeking to distort or physically harm America by far the most evident avenue today is through terrorist actions . . . and some groups clearly have and are further obtaining means for conducting such actions.

I have in the past suggested that a consequence of these considerations is to pose two major challenges to America and its government as it carries out its responsibilities to the American people in the twenty-first century. The first of these is the challenge of balancing our admirable unwillingness to stand idly by while others on our planet suffer at the hands of bullies . . . while on the other hand avoiding simply becoming "911 America," on call to solve the world's problems. The second of these challenges is to defend America's homeland itself against attacks which now have the potential to produce enormous casualties, a concern that has not enjoyed high priority throughout most of our nation's history due to our geographical location, our military capability, the limitations of our enemies and our national policies.

Among the concerns now confronting us as a nation is that, after a series of

such events as we witnessed on September 11th, our citizenry might be prepared to forego many of the freedoms that we hold so dear. We of course have already been required to give up certain of the freedoms in our lifestyles, but to bow to terrorists in any extended manner would merely be to grant them victory. Yet, it may well be required that we sacrifice more in this regard than we would wish if we are to avoid repeated instances of major terrorist acts. A near-worst case, and unfortunately not an impossible case, would be one wherein our citizenry eventually is forced to become sufficiently injured to terrorist actions that the latter are viewed much as are the 40,000 deaths suffered in automobile accidents in America each year—a seeming price of living in society, a price which we tacitly accept as we go about our lives.

Clearly we have much to learn--and even more to do--if we are to thwart terrorism and its consequences. The proposal contained in S.1867 to learn from the events of September 11th, appears to be a logical undertaking. In the final assessment, however, its usefulness will in large part depend upon the quality and judgment of the people and staff involved in the endeavor and the perspective they elect to embrace as they pursue their task. Specifically, there would seem to be little to be gained simply by revisiting history for history's sake--and in fact, such an undertaking could be counter-productive and even divisive. Furthermore, it would be important that the Commission not unduly burden those who bear the heavy responsibility of recovering from past terrorist attacks and preventing future ones. On the other hand, if those involved in the Commission's work are able to take a forward-looking perspective coupled with a broad view of lessons to be learned which can impact our future security, then they will have made a significant contribution. It is apparent from the wording of the legislation that its drafters were well aware of these considerations.

I would like to make two specific comments in regard to the proposed legislation itself. The first is that as written it appears to exclude the events associated with the Anthrax attacks of the past Fall, yet these attacks also offer important lessons. This exclusion presumably was elected for good reason, namely the events of September 11th and the attacks involving the postal system appear to be independent at least in so far as their excursion is concerned. But the relatively limited Anthrax attacks may well have provided an extremely important wake-up call to America to a threat perhaps much greater even than that of the type witnessed on September 11th. I refer to the use of biological and chemical agents and nuclear devices by terrorists. It therefore needs to be clear what is the intent of S.1867 with regard to threats beyond those specifically observed on September 11th.

Second, the proposed legislation does not make clear how much of the Commission's work is to be conducted in full public view. America prides itself in pursuing the affairs of government under a spotlight and this is of course to our credit. At the same time, many of the topics the Commission will presumably wish to discuss are topics to which one would just as soon our enemies not be privy. Here I particularly address those issues that do not fall under the formal statutes governing national security but rather involve information that in today's world may nonetheless deserve protection.

In summary, I believe that a Commission of the type which has been proposed could indeed be beneficial, but only if conducted in a highly sensitive and responsible fashion. Clearly, we live in a new world. Thomas Jefferson's reminder that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance" has never been more true.

Thank you for opportunity to appear before you today.

[Committee Members](#) | [Subcommittees](#) | [Hearings](#) | [Key Legislation](#) | [Jurisdiction](#)
[Press Statements](#) | [Current Issues](#) | [Video of Select Hearings](#) | [Sites of Interest](#)