

STATEMENT**THE NATIONAL COMMISSION
ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES**
Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing

Chairman Joe Lieberman

February 7, 2002

Good morning and welcome to our hearing today on legislation Senator McCain and I have introduced to establish an independent commission to examine and report upon the facts and causes relating to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Because of minor surgery, Senator McCain is unable to testify today.

We introduced this legislation late last year because we felt it was important to get the truth about how those assaults could have happened and whether there was anything the federal government might have done to prevent them. An independent and impartial commission composed of knowledgeable citizens, we felt, was the best way to learn the lessons of September 11, so that we, in Congress - together with the President and those serving with him in the Executive Branch - have the information we need to make the best choices about protecting the future security of the American people at home.

Our proposal would create a National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States that would be charged with constructing a full picture of the circumstances surrounding the attacks, including the federal government's preparedness and response. The Commission would also be charged with formulating recommendations for ways to strengthen our defenses against future terrorist attacks.

Rarely in our history have events left scars on our national psyche as deep as those left in the aftermath of September 11, when more than 3,000 Americans were killed. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, clearly, was one, and it was followed by an independent investigative commission and a congressional investigation.

There have been many more recent commissions that have examined a range of sensitive national security crises. Our military, for example, has investigated major terrorist actions - as it did, for example, after the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole - in order to learn the lessons that might prevent future tragedies.

The most obvious question we have, of course, is how the terrorists' plot succeeded despite the vast intelligence capabilities of our nation. But we must also look into possible systemic deficiencies in our counter-terrorism capabilities, our immigration and border control, and even our diplomatic activities.

The best way to achieve the unvarnished truth is to allow those who know the most about the array of subjects that must be explored to deliberate in an atmosphere free of politics. Senator McCain and I have tried to create those optimum conditions. As we envision it, the commission will have 14 members - four of them appointed by the president and 10 appointed by relevant committee chairs of Congress. No more than seven members may be of the same party. And none will be current officeholders.

The initial months after September 11 were - understandably and appropriately -preoccupied with mourning and healing, and prosecution of the war in

Afghanistan. Now that the Taliban has been removed from power and the reconstruction of Afghanistan is underway, we can and should pursue in earnest the process of finding answers to our questions.

Determining the causes and circumstances of the terrorist attacks will ensure that those who lost their lives on this second American "day of infamy" did not die in vain. The commission we propose would not only pay tribute to the victims of September 11 but convey to their survivors, and all Americans, that their government is doing everything within its power to protect their future.

We're fortunate to have with us this morning four witnesses who have served on commissions that assessed the growing threat of terrorism, and who, therefore, have expertise particularly relevant to the work of a national commission looking into September 11. Congressman Dave McCurdy, now the President of the Electronic Industries Alliance, is the former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee; he also chaired subcommittees responsible for aviation policy and military installations. Norman Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin, is one of the nation's most respected corporate leaders, and has served on a number of commissions, including the Hart-Rudman review of our national security policies. We also have two members of the National Commission on Terrorism: Maurice Sonnenberg, who served as commission vice-chair, and who has also contributed his time to many other national commissions and delegations, and Professor Richard Betts, Director of the Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University.

Gentlemen, welcome, and thank you for helping this country direct its resources to combat terrorism.

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