

STATEMENT

Hearing on Establishing A National Department of Homeland Security Senate Governmental Affairs Committee

Chairman Joe Lieberman

April 11, 2002

Thank you all for being here this morning. Today, the Governmental Affairs Committee will consider legislation introduced by Senator Specter and myself to organize the federal government so that it can better prevent, effectively prepare for, and quickly respond to terrorist acts made against American citizens on American territory.

This is a follow-up to two hearings we held last fall on whether the government, and specifically the executive branch, is adequately organized to meet the type of security threats we can expect post September 11.

Given President Bush's decision last fall to establish an Office of Homeland Security and appoint former Governor Tom Ridge to head it, I think it was clear the proper structures and mechanisms were not in place to adequately protect our homeland.

But we must still ask, six months into Governor Ridge's appointment, whether we are any better positioned to defend ourselves against another terrorist attack within our borders. Are the gaps in our security policies closing? Are dozens of agencies with a role to play in protecting the American people against terrorism coordinating their activities better? Has duplication of efforts diminished? Governor Ridge, I'm sure, has done everything within his power to make this nation safer. He has helped to boost the administration's homeland security budget and he has implemented a new warning system. But I fear this is not enough. And the reason is that he lacks the necessary authority to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles that always get in the way of major change in the way government conducts its business.

The administration's refusal to allow Governor Ridge to testify publicly before this and other Congressional committees on his activities makes our job unnecessarily difficult. I see the Governor is on the House side today - albeit, speaking behind closed doors - with the Government Reform Committee. But given the bearing of his work on the lives of every man, woman, and child living within our borders, he needs to work with Congress, in public, to fully explore these issues, to flesh out his successes, to describe his difficulties, and to discuss his needs. And he must do this from a position of strength and authority. America's war against terrorism at home must not be allowed to get mired in wars over bureaucratic turf.

The bottom line is: if statutory and budget authority are not conferred upon the director of homeland security, the homeland defense of this nation will always be less than what it should be. Governor Ridge and his successors need to centralize their authority so that our anti-terrorism polices are consistent and thorough. They need the power to knock heads to overcome bureaucratic resistance, to eliminate wasteful duplication of effort, and to target precious resources. And they need control over the budgets of agencies they are charged with overseeing so that those agencies will see clearly what needs to be done. Together, these features will give the new agency the muscle necessary to compete with thousands of other demands for public money and attention.

Last October, Senator Specter and I introduced legislation to establish a

cabinet-level Department of National Homeland Security, led by a presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed secretary, who would be a member of the National Security Council - accountable not just to the president, but to Congress and to the public.

The Department would combine the Coast Guard, the Border Patrol, Customs, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and two smaller critical infrastructure offices. The secretary would coordinate with state and local governments and other federal agencies; provide planning guidance; oversee training programs; and generally call the shots in the event of another terrorist attack.

In creating the new Department, we will be bringing together under one roof, and therefore concentrating our focus, on the agencies most critical to securing our borders, protecting our critical infrastructure, and ensuring that we are effectively prepared to respond to an attack at the federal, state, and local levels.

We recognize that, no matter how robust a Department we create, it will not include every agency that plays a role in homeland security. But the bill we will discuss today contains a number of improvements over our earlier version. The most significant changes are a requirement for a national strategy to combat terrorism and the establishment of a White House office to coordinate that strategy, as Senator Graham proposed in legislation last year. These key improvements underscore the seriousness with which we regard the job of protecting the American public and they speak to the public's desire - the public's need - for the best protection we can provide them. And, on an operational level, these improvements allow for the government to coordinate anti-terrorism activities of the military and intelligence communities, which would be beyond the purview of a cabinet-level department.

The National Office for Combating Terrorism would be led by a presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed director charged with assessing terrorist threats and, along with the department secretary, developing a strategy and a budget to fight terrorism here at home. The director would coordinate execution of the strategy by relevant federal agencies - particularly those concerned with intelligence and law enforcement.

With this combined approach, we address the need to permanently restructure critical homeland security functions under a cabinet-level Secretary who has operational authority and the ability to personally direct a government-wide plan. At the same time, we provide for the level of coordination with other federal agencies, and budget certification authority, that can most effectively be implemented from the White House.

The formation of a Department of Homeland Security requires a major restructuring of the federal government's public safety-related responsibilities. I know this will not be easy. It was Machiavelli who said "there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system." But a restructuring of the kind we envision is not unprecedented. We have undertaken bold organizational change in periods of crisis before. Consider General Marshall's transformation of the army which helped win World War II or the National Security Act of 1947 that created the CIA and Department of Defense in the midst of the Cold War. More recently, the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, in streamlining the military command, helped us to prosecute the Persian Gulf War.

We need such a change now to help us fight and win the war against terrorism, at home and abroad.

[Summary of Draft Legislation](#)

[**NATIONAL HOMELAND SECURITY AND COMBATTING TERRORISM**](#)

[ACT OF 2002](#)

-30-

[Committee Members](#) | [Subcommittees](#) | [Hearings](#) | [Key Legislation](#) | [Jurisdiction](#)
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