

PRESS STATEMENT

Senator Joe Lieberman

**Senate Governmental Affairs Committee
Hearing on Department of Homeland Security**

Thursday, June 20, 2002

This morning, this Committee returns to its consideration of the creation of a new Department of Homeland Security, a focused domestic defense agency which would guard our great country against those who seek to suppress our values and destroy our way of life by terrorizing our people.

Our challenge and our responsibility after September 11th is to adapt, respond, and reform to protect our people from future terrorist attacks. It should be no contest. We have so much more strength, wealth, talent, and technology than our enemies. And we have our enduring faith, unity, and patriotism to guide us in our work.

Two remarkable realities of American history are that no matter how much we've changed to meet the challenges of each succeeding generation, we've stayed, in essence, the same nation committed to the same values. Now, we've got to change again—to become not just safer, but better. In part, this is a matter of executive reorganization. But it's also, more broadly, a test of whether we can transform the people's government at a time of crisis, against the friction of entrenched interests, while protecting our freedoms.

The urgency of our circumstances after the terrorist attacks of September 11th requires us to proceed with a singular focus on swiftly creating a new department of our government that has an unequivocal mission, broad jurisdiction, defined lines of authority, and adequate resources to get the job of homeland security done.

In our work here, we have strong foundations to build on: the excellent work of the Hart-Rudman Commission, the proposal reported out of this committee last month and the President's proposal of two weeks ago, all of which call for a cabinet-level homeland security department. I am grateful that the President's plan is in many respects similar to our committee's proposal. That will certainly make our task more manageable.

But there are differences between the two plans, and we will have to reconcile them. We must also be open to constructive additions of ideas not included or adequately covered in either proposal. We're not trying to create the biggest possible department here, but we are determined to build a structure that will give the American people the protection they need and deserve.

With all due respect to the critics of this reorganization, this isn't about rearranging the deck chairs on a sinking ship. It's about building a stronger ship of state that's better equipped to carry the American people safely through the rough waters ahead.

Among the unsettled questions we face in our work are the following:

First, we must improve the collection of domestic terrorism intelligence and decide how to redress the awful lack of coordination and information sharing

among key agencies, including the FBI and the CIA, that now appears to have been the most glaring failure of our government leading up to September 11th. The legislation authored by Senators Specter, Graham, and myself, would create a statutory Office for Combating Terrorism within the White House to oversee such coordination. The President's proposal would create an information analysis center in the Department which would collect and synthesize intelligence from the FBI, CIA, NSA, and other agencies. Neither proposal may be adequate to the threat. Others have suggested that we should take an even bolder step by creating a Domestic Intelligence Agency similar to those in Britain and other European countries, perhaps within the Department of Homeland Security, perhaps outside it. We should consider those alternatives and others.

Second, we must determine how best to integrate the resources and expertise of our military into this effort. The Department of Defense is itself in the process of being refocused to meet the challenge of asymmetrical, high-tech, and terrorist threats—including the creation of a new Northern Command, headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which will take on the new responsibility of homeland defense. A Department of Homeland Security that ignores the evolving contours of our military will be the weaker for it.

Third, we must optimize coordination between the Department of Homeland Security and the hundreds of thousands of local police officers, firefighters, emergency response workers, and public health officials on the frontlines in our states, counties, and municipalities. Those professionals, those public servants, can be critically important not just as first responders, but as intelligence gatherers. They must be in the mix, not on the sidelines, as we formulate this agency. And they will need to receive significant additional funds to do the job that we are asking them to do.

There are likely to be other important areas that will need resolution and clarification. But this cannot be a leisurely process. "Slowly but surely" won't do it in this case. We must proceed swiftly and surely, because our terrorist enemies have clearly not abandoned their intention to do the American people terrible harm. I intend to move this legislation through Committee, and to the Senate floor, by mid-July. I hope we can pass it and send it to the President by the end of this session at the latest.

After September 11th, the meaning of security has changed in America. The painful fact is that we allowed ourselves to become vulnerable. But as we rebuild and raise our defenses, we must not begin to believe that future, successful terrorist attacks are inevitable, or that future loss of American life must be accepted as a necessary casualty of freedom. That is why we need to raise our guard and organize our strength quickly and surely in this new department.

A long time ago, in 1777, William Pitt the Elder advised the British with regard to the feisty colonies that had broken away from the Crown to secure their freedom, "You cannot conquer America." Two hundred and twenty-five years later, we will prove Pitt right again.

Creating a Department of Homeland Security now is a direct fulfillment of the mission those feisty and principled Founders of ours gave those of us who are privileged to serve in our national government when they wrote the preamble to our Constitution more than two centuries ago. It reads, "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

When we come together in this 107th Session of Congress to create this new department, as I am confident we will, we will have formed a more perfect union, insured domestic tranquility, provided for the common defense, and secured the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

Senator Thompson...

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