

TESTIMONY

Statement by Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher

Before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee

"Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you and Senator Thompson for inviting me to testify in support of a critical step Congress must take to improve the security and safety of the United States.

"It is thanks to your strong leadership, Mr. Chairman, and that of your colleagues Senators Graham and Specter, that we developed legislation to create a Department of National Homeland Security with authority over the key components in the federal government dedicated to protecting the nation.

"I am pleased to testify today with my House colleagues, Representatives Mac Thornberry and Jane Harman, with whom I have worked to create the House version of this bill. I especially applaud Mac Thornberry for his tremendous foresight on this issue long before September 11 even happened. My friend, former Senator Rudman, has also worked hard on this issue and his recommendations have been included in our bill.

"We are here because the administration has not given Governor Ridge the right tools to do his job and to protect the American people.

"That's why Congress needs to create a Homeland Security Department that would work in concert with a National Office for Combating Terrorism in the White House. It is the only way to really focus and unify the homeland security efforts in the federal government.

"We need to think boldly about how to protect Americans from the increasing terrorist threat.

"The House and Senate bills are the right way to help the federal government address America's biggest national security challenge because they will give Governor Ridge the resources and authority he needs to protect our homeland.

"It simply doesn't make sense to have more than 40 government agencies responsible for various pieces of counter-terrorism and homeland security like we do today.

"By consolidating FEMA, Customs, the law enforcement portions of the INS, the Coast Guard, and parts of the F.B.I. into a new agency in charge of homeland security, we will focus our counter-terrorism efforts and make them exponentially more effective.

"Another portion of the bill that I believe will make a real difference is the creation of an Office of Science and Technology within the new agency. This office will better channel the wealth of expertise at our nation's defense laboratories to detect and counter the terrorist threat.

"Overall, I believe President Bush took an important first step when he named Governor Ridge to coordinate our nation's homeland security efforts. But it was just that – a first step. If Congress doesn't follow the President's lead, Governor Ridge's efforts are doomed to fail.

"The administration insists that it does not need a legislative mandate from Congress and that the power of Governor Ridge's relationship with the President will overcome all bureaucratic odds. But I would rather 'trust' and 'verify' than depend on a personal relationship that may or may not exist with another president.

"We need to ensure that any future Homeland Security Director does not have to beg for resources from four dozen different bureaucracies.

"There is no room for error when it comes to protecting America.

"We need to give the person in charge of homeland security the tools, authority and money he needs to succeed. And creating a Homeland Security Department is the way to do that.

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman."

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