

## STATEMENT

### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR FRED THOMPSON

#### Ranking Member, Senate Governmental Affairs Committee

#### Business Meeting To Consider Establishing a Department of Homeland Security

Wednesday, July 24, 2002

Thank you Mr. Chairman for your leadership on this issue. You were very forceful early on with regard to this issue and you have been consistent with your efforts and work and persuasiveness that this needs to be done, and I want to thank you and your staff. I'd also like to thank our staff for all of the hard work that they have put into this we certainly have a lot of work ahead of us to do.

I don't think its inappropriate to point out the basis for why we're here today - and that is that we're at war, and this legislation can be, if not the, one of the center pieces in our effort to win that war and to protect ourselves. It's going to be a long term effort and what we do here today and what the Senate and Congress ultimately does, I believe, will have a long term effect on this country. It will certainly outlive us and I think probably will be with us for generations to come, unfortunately because the threat of marrying high technology with extremism and radicalism will still be there.

The difference between now and times past when we've had similar challenges is that the war has been brought home to us. Thus the need for homeland security. I think everyone pretty well agrees now that a department is needed. Some of us were more enthusiastic than others in the beginning, some of us thought the timing was wrong, some of us thought the scope should be different, but I think we've all come together now on the idea that a new department is needed. But, I think it is very important to emphasize how large and difficult this undertaking is. It's mammoth. It will take a long time to get done and it is going to be very difficult for us. It is going to be difficult because in many respects we have a government which is dysfunctional from a management standpoint and now we're trying to do a major merger within a dysfunctional government. We need to face up to that.

This committee over the years, under the leadership of Senator Stevens, Senator Lieberman, myself and others, have seen parades of witnesses and GAO reports pointing that out to us - that we must do better. We're a government that can't pass an audit. We spend billions a year on improper payments and other wasteful and improper expenditures. We lose millions of dollars of equipment in goods, and we have spent billions of dollars on trying to establish information technology systems and getting our computers to talk to one another, and the IRS and other agencies, for many years unsuccessfully. We have a human capital crisis, as has been mentioned, and Senator Voinovich will remind us again today, I'm sure, that Senators Hart and Rudman pointed out. Yes, we want to protect civil service rights, but we need to recognize this, Paul Light who used to work for Senator Glenn on this committee and now at the Brookings Institution points out to us, we have a civil service system that has problems.

We have substantial overlap and duplication. The GAO comes to us with a high risk list every year pointing out that we have agencies and departments year

after year who are making no improvement with regard to issues concerning waste and fraud and mismanagement. Now that is the background that we're operating in here today. That's not to cast dispersion on anyone or all the many good people who for so long have tried to do something about this, but that is the background. Now we're coming to merge 22 of these agencies and 170,000 or 200,000 people, within the midst of this. In other words we think we're going to take all of these problems and come right into the middle of it, with the most important part of it, and somehow have a smooth-running, efficient, secure, well-managed operation. I'm not saying it's impossible, I'm saying it's extremely difficult.

When I read about CEO's who have seen through mergers that are much, much less complicated than the one that we're going about now, and they give us about a 20% chance of success, it causes me to wonder what it is we need to do to make sure those chances are greater. We can't afford not to be successful. Especially the transition period that we're going to go through in putting all this together is going to be difficult. If you'll pardon the reference, Mr. Chairman, I think we're somewhat like an elephant on roller skates attempting to learn to juggle.

Now there will be many amendments here today and some of them will have to do with what this new department will look like, but many of them will have to do with how this new department is going to be run. We clearly need innovation and flexibility and we need to look at things somewhat differently. Our bottom line criteria should be not personal and parochial interests, vested interests, and pressure groups, but will this provision make our country safer. Surely after we all agree how important it is to have a new department with new expanded powers to face a new threat that it must be run in the same old way. In a way, that I emphasize again, is just not working with regard to so many of our departments in government.

So, Mr. Chairman, thank you again for your leadership on this issue. I promise to work with you toward a product we can all be proud of. Clearly this transcends all of our other interests. There will be other Democratic presidents, there will be other Republican controlled Senates and we're doing something that is going to transcend all of that. I'm sure we'll all keep that in mind as we try to establish something that will stand the test of time through ups and downs and various other administrations, and I look forward to working with you toward that end. Thank you.

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