

9/11 panel's report must not go unheeded

By Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton

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WASHINGTON - For many Americans, the shock and horror of the 9/11 attacks have faded. Yet the threat to us remains. Terrorists continue to strike American interests around the globe, as they did before 9/11. Al-Qaida is a patient, adaptable and determined enemy. Its intentions are clear. Today, in some dark corner of the globe, terrorists are again plotting against our homeland.

A year ago, the 9/11 commission made 41 recommendations to make our country safer and more secure. These recommendations flowed directly from the lessons of 9/11. We believe they are too important to go unheeded.

Over the next four months, the 9/11 Public Discourse Project, the nonprofit successor to the 9/11 commission, will convene a series of eight public panels, culminating in a report card to assess the progress of reform.

Along the way, we will highlight key 9/11 commission recommendations that remain unaddressed. They include:

- Keeping the world's most dangerous weapons out of the hands of terrorists.

A nuclear 9/11 is not the most likely terrorist event. Yet the human toll, and the consequences for our very way of life, would be unimaginable. A relatively small investment today can greatly reduce the risk of this nightmare. Without access to the world's limited supply of weapons-grade nuclear material, terrorists cannot build even a crude nuclear weapon. No nuclear material, no bomb.

In our report in July, we called for a "maximum effort" to prevent nuclear terrorism. That has not yet happened. We encourage the president, with the bipartisan support of Congress, to declare the goal of securing all nuclear materials worldwide within four years. With a maximum effort, we can keep these materials out of terrorist hands.

- Allocating homeland security grants on the basis of risk, not politics.

Since 9/11, the federal government has allocated more than \$6 billion in federal funding for terrorism preparedness. We recommended that these funds be distributed strictly on the basis of risks and vulnerabilities, not as political pork. A bipartisan bill that has

passed the House by a 409-10 vote would be a good first step toward implementing this common-sense recommendation.

- Providing reliable radio spectrum to our first responders.

On 9/11, the failure of communications systems led to the unnecessary loss of many lives, especially those of first responders. Four years later, America's police, firefighters and EMTs are still waiting for reliable radio spectrum to ensure that they can communicate during any future attack or disaster.

Broadcasters continue to occupy valuable spectrum they were loaned nearly a decade ago to facilitate the transition to digital television. With the lives of America's first responders on the line, Congress should fix a firm deadline for the return of that spectrum, and its reallocation, for public safety purposes.

- Reorganizing Congress for the post-9/11 era.

The American people rely on the committees of the Congress to supervise the agencies responsible for keeping them safe. Unfortunately, Congress is not organized to be an effective partner and watchdog in the post-9/11 era.

The House and Senate homeland security committees lack sufficient authority over all counterterrorism activities of the Department of Homeland Security. Too many other committees have overlapping authority and second-guess their work. Secretary Michael Chertoff reports to too many bosses.

This is unacceptable. The American people rely on these two committees to ensure that DHS is doing its job. To make that happen, the homeland security committees need unchallenged authority over the department so that they can be held accountable.

Nearly every member of Congress we asked told us that the intelligence oversight process is dysfunctional. The House and Senate intelligence committees are the only source of independent oversight of the intelligence community.

Yet structural problems make it nearly impossible for them to perform effective oversight. Modest reforms do not change the reality that the intelligence committees are still overshadowed and second-guessed by powerful standing committees whose attention to intelligence oversight is episodic.

This problem is most acute in the appropriations process. While both the House and Senate wisely created separate appropriations subcommittees for homeland security, intelligence programs are still funded by the appropriations subcommittees for defense. Those subcommittees understandably pay much more attention to defense issues than they do to intelligence.

This structural problem enables the intelligence agencies to bypass their designated overseers (the intelligence committees) and appeal directly to their funders when they get an answer they do not like. Separate appropriations subcommittees to fund the intelligence community would strengthen Congress' ability to hold those agencies to account.

This summer, we will explore why, four years after 9/11, these common-sense reforms remain unaddressed. Other topics will include border and transportation security, civil liberties, foreign policy and public diplomacy.

The greatest responsibility of our government is to protect the American people. For the members of the 9/11 commission, that responsibility did not end with our final report. For us, and for our government, there is more work to be done.

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