



September 11, 2014

Dear Chairman McCaul:

We write to urge Congress to reform and strengthen its oversight of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security during reorganization for the 114th Congress, as a matter of vital importance for our nation's security. We agree with 9/11 Commission co-chairs Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton that, as a result of the existing oversight structure, "the nation is not as safe as it could and should be."

As you know, DHS is currently expected to report to more than 100 Congressional committees, subcommittees, and other groups. The tangle of overlapping committees leads to political paralysis, increasing the nation's vulnerability to multiple threats, including cyber-attacks, biohazards, and small boats and planes carrying unknown cargo.

Today marks 13 years since one of the darkest days in our nation's history. As we consider the challenges to our homeland security from an array of looming threats, remarks at your Committee's July 23 hearing by 9/11 Commission member Jamie Gorelick have a chilling urgency:

After the next disaster, someone will ask, who in Congress was in charge? Who was performing the oversight? ... Everyone knows that when everyone is in charge, no one is. But it would be too bad if it takes another disaster to make that point.

Fragmented Congressional oversight also wastes taxpayer dollars. During the first year of the 111th Congress, DHS spent approximately 66 work-years just responding to questions from Congress. A significant portion of the millions of dollars it took that year to answer more than 11,000 letters, provide more than 2,000 briefings, and make available 232 witnesses at 166 hearings, could have been better spent directly carrying out **DHS's core mission of ensuring a safer, more secure America.**

We therefore endorse the recommendation of the 9/11 Commission—the only one of its recommendations that has not been significantly acted upon in the decade since—that:

Congress should create a single, principal point of oversight and review for homeland security. Congressional leaders are best able to judge what committee should have jurisdiction over this department and its duties. But we believe that Congress does have the obligation to choose one in the House and one in the Senate, and that this committee should be a permanent standing committee with a nonpartisan staff.

We believe that, a decade after the 9/11 Commission Report and 13 years after the devastating attacks of 9/11, Congress must finally act to consolidate and thereby strengthen its oversight of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Sincerely,

Richard Ben-Veniste

Member, 9/11 Commission

Steven Bradbury

Acting Assistant Attorney General and Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legal Counsel, U.S. Department of Justice (2004-2009)

James Carafano

Member, Homeland Security Advisory Council

Frank Cilluffo

Director, Homeland Security Policy Institute, George Washington University

Gus Coldebella

Acting General Counsel (2007-2009) and Deputy General Counsel (2005-2007), U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Partner, Goodwin Procter LLP

Elaine C. Duke

Former Under Secretary for Management, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

John Farmer

Senior Counsel, 9/11 Commission

Ivan K. Fong

General Counsel, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2009-2012)

Dan Glickman

Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture (1995-2001); Member, U.S. House of Representatives from Kansas (1977-1995)

Jamie Gorelick

Member, 9/11 Commission

Slade Gorton

U.S. Senator from Washington (1981-1987, 1989-2001); Member, 9/11 Commission

Lee Hamilton

Member, U.S. House of Representatives from Indiana (1965-1999); Vice Chair, 9/11 Commission

Michael Hayden

General, USAF (Ret.); Director, Central Intelligence Agency (2006-2009); Director, National Security Agency (1999-2005)

Daniel Kaniewski

Special Assistant to the President for Homeland Security (2007–2008)

Thomas Kean

Governor of New Jersey (1982-1990); Chair, 9/11 Commission

Bob Kerrey

Member, 9/11 Commission

John Lehman

Member, 9/11 Commission

Mike Leiter

Director, National Counterterrorism Center (2007-2011)

Carie Lemack

Director, Homeland Security Project, Bipartisan Policy Center; Member, Homeland Security Advisory Council

Richard B. Myers

General, USAF (Ret.); 15th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (2001-2005)

Timothy Roemer

Member, U.S. House of Representatives from Indiana (1991-2003); Member, 9/11 Commission

Paul Rosenzweig

Red Branch Consulting; Former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Department of Homeland Security

Paul Schneider

Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2008-2009)

Erroll G. Southers

University of Southern California

Lydia Waters Thomas

Member, Homeland Security Advisory Council

James R. Thompson

Senior Chairman, Winston & Strawn; Member, 9/11 Commission

Pamela J. Turner

Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2003-2006)

Vincent J. Vitkowsky

Seiger Gfeller Laurie LLP

Caryn Wagner

Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2010-2012)

Kenneth L. Wainstein

Partner, Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP; Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism

William H. Webster

Chairman, Homeland Security Advisory Council

cc: The Honorable John Boehner, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Pete Sessions, Chairman, House Committee on Rules
The Honorable Richard Nugent, Member, House Committee on Rules