

Closing Statement at 9-11 Commission Hearing
Chair Thomas H. Kean and Vice Chair Lee H. Hamilton

January 27, 2004

The last two days have been the first opportunity for the Commission to show the American public some of the deep factual work that has been done since we started the fact-finding process some ten months ago. The Commission staff has really dug in with a thorough investigation. The staff has done superb work, and we are breaking new ground.

We are proud of our colleagues on the Commission. You have seen the energy they have displayed and their determination to pursue the issues. Their questions were excellent.

You have been able to see some of our factual inquiry. We have presented only a small part of what we have learned. We are covering many other subjects, and much of our work is still classified. Our investigation is careful, tedious, precise—and fruitful. We believe these two days of hearings are a good illustration of how the Commission is carrying out its mandate to provide a “full and complete accounting” of the facts and circumstances surrounding the attacks. We expect that we will be able to bring forward additional significant information to the public in future hearings, as well as our final report.

Yesterday we introduced new information about the government’s failure to prevent the entry of the hijackers into the United States. That information raised important issues about the whole way our government integrated terrorist travel into its strategy for the war on terrorism. Opportunities were lost:

- Some, perhaps many, of the terrorists used passports that were doctored or had other indicators associated with terrorists.
- Some made detectable false statements on their visa applications.
- Some made false statements to gain entry into the United States, exploiting a weak system that, for instance in the case of Mohammed Atta’s reentry in January 2001, gave them the benefit of the doubt.
- Some violated our immigration laws, and these violations could not be detected. We also discovered that the travel issues revealed a much larger set of problems, problems in the way we conduct intelligence operations, the basic way we wage the war on terror. We did not watchlist three future hijackers in time to stop them. But this watchlisting failure was just one aspect of a larger failure in the practice of intelligence that raises hard questions for the senior managers of the CIA and the Intelligence Community.

We think yesterday's hearing raised a fundamental question. While our top officials worked hard to prevent new terrorist attacks, did we really change our government to wage a new kind of war against a new kind of enemy? And have we made those changes now?

All of those points were reinforced by what we heard today. We heard vital information about precisely how the attackers defeated the civil aviation security system of the United States. For example:

- We learned that the "no-fly" lists offered an opportunity to stop the hijackers, but the FAA had not been provided any of their names, even though two of them were already watchlisted in TIPOFF.
- We learned that the prescreening process selected 9 of the 19 hijackers, but the consequences of selection only meant matching baggage to passengers to prevent them from bringing explosives on the plane. Therefore, prescreening was irrelevant to defeating the plot.
- We learned that deadly knives, with blades less than 4 inches long, could be brought aboard our aircraft—and apparently were.
- We learned that the 'Red Team' process discovered these weaknesses in our defenses, but their discoveries did not produce needed solutions.
- We learned that onboard security efforts, including the Federal Air Marshal Program, had eroded to the vanishing point.
- We learned that the hijackers really needed to beat just one layer of security—the security checkpoint. The hijackers analyzed our system and developed a plan they felt sure would beat it in every case. And 19 out of 19 succeeded.

We also learned how the hijackers beat the last line of defense, on the four flights, because the professionals had been trained to cooperate with hijackers, not fight them.

We presented a great deal of information about the enemy. We heard how the terrorists got their pilot training. We learned about their tactics. We received information on how they may have flown those aircraft to their targets. We learned what weapons they used, and did not use. As much as we have learned about the enemy, however, there is more we need to know about them.

We learned again today of remarkable acts of courage and professionalism, both by those who perished, and those on the ground who came before us to tell of heroism in the skies.

Our commissioners posed some hard questions to the witnesses today. The record of those exchanges speaks for itself. To cite just one example: A former head of civil

aviation security for the FAA acknowledged that the first time he heard about the U.S. government's watchlist of terrorists was ... yesterday, during our hearing.

Finally, we wish to touch upon a process issue. All of you know the Commission has been considering whether to seek an extension of its statutory deadline. The good news is that most of our documentary and interview work is done. The Commission has already conducted about 900 interviews. The bad news is that much work remains, and some hard work in finalizing our report.

We are aware of the political arguments back and forth about whether an extension is a good thing. We have decided that the right course is simply this: Put aside the politics and just ask for the time we really need.

The Commission therefore requests that the Congress amend our statute to extend the deadlines for completing our report by at least 60 days. What would that mean?

The current due date for our report is May 27. Our request would change that due date to July 26. As in the current statute, we would then have another 60 days for the administrative work involved in closing down the Commission and archiving its records.

We are confident that we can provide the President, the Congress, and the American people with a strong and credible report.

We welcome your questions.