THE HONORABLE TOM RIDGE
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Thank you, Representative King and Ranking Member Thompson, members of the Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to join you and your colleagues today as we reflect upon our nation's security efforts ten years after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, and as we consider our priorities for the future.

And I'm pleased to be joined today at the witness table by Representative Lee Hamilton and GAO Comptroller General Gene Dodaro, who each bring distinguished credentials and a significant point of view to our conversation today.

As I look back over the last ten years, it is abundantly clear that America was, is, and always will be an undeniably resilient nation.

In a decade's time, we strengthened our intelligence assets and partnered with allies and friends. We captured and killed terrorists and destroyed safe havens in Afghanistan and around the globe.

We stood up a new department, Homeland Security, and re-positioned as the country embraced an emotionally charged and strategically driven national mission.

We improved preparedness and response capabilities and established layers of security throughout our aviation system.

We embedded new technologies and security measures throughout the public and private sectors.

Individual citizens are more prepared and more aware.

With public and private sector leadership and investment, we are more secure. But we remain a target nonetheless.

Over the course of ten years, the threat remains strong and continues to change. We have thwarted some attacks, but we have also been fortunate that a few others have simply failed. While it makes some uncomfortable, we must acknowledge that no matter how hard we try, another attack is likely. The onus is on us then – to understand that there's more to do – and that luck is not a strategy.

As we close one vulnerability, we should anticipate that terrorists will adapt and seek out another – and be ready for that.

We must view security as an ongoing process, not an endpoint. A deliberative process, not a breathless reaction to all conceivable threats, is required at all times.

Terrorists do not rest, so neither can we. We have wrist watches – they have time. A number of security measures await our attention.

We have strengthened information sharing in country and among allies and friends, but we still saw an attempted Christmas Day bomber come very close to his goals due to overt and repeated information not being shared. We need to create a culture of intelligence sharing where everyone feels empowered to hit the send button, to share more, not less.

We have bolstered communication technologies, but an interoperable broadband communications system remains undelivered. If the tragedy of 9/11, the specific recommendations of the 9/11 Commission and the sustained pleas of police, firemen, and emergency service professionals cannot generate federal support for such a network, then what will it take?

We have instituted an entry system to validate who comes into the country, but have not created an exit system that ensures these same visitors leave and do not exploit an as-yet unfinished system. It is likely therefore that we have people among us who have overstayed their visas. Where are they now and what are they doing? Where is the sense of urgency needed to address this?

Respectfully, the issue of Congressional oversight is a 9/11 recommendation that goes unanswered. You have heard the statistics on numbers of hearings, briefings, preparation time and so forth. What is important is that these numbers have increased across the tenure of three DHS secretaries, and continue to cause significant distraction, overlap and bureaucracy – three characteristics that run counterintuitive to the urgency and focus required of national security.

My hope is this issue and other concerns I've addressed will receive our urgent attention and successful resolution.

It is easy, I know, to cite all of the vulnerabilities we have yet to address and the 9/11 recommendations we have yet to meet. The needs and wants are limitless. Resources are not. So we must manage the risk carefully and judiciously. That responsibility is great and complex. And ten years later, it doesn’t get any easier.

The killing of Osama bin Laden illustrates this point well. The news about bin Laden capped a decade of emotion, but we all knew that the threat would remain long after the man.

Ten years is not a lot of time, but it is enough time to know that in the next ten years, the fight will still be with us. It will go on. But so will we, as a stronger and more secure country, as the resilient and freedom-loving people we have always been, and as a nation that will always remember those we lost one September day.

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