

**Testimony of Beverly Eckert
Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform**

**Hearings to Review 9/11 Commission Recommendations
Tuesday, August 3, 2004**

Honorable Chairman Davis, Distinguished Members of this Committee, ladies and gentlemen:

My name is Beverly Eckert. I'm appearing here today as a member of the 9/11 Commission's Family Steering Committee. We appreciate the opportunity you have given us to participate in this hearing. It is both a privilege and a responsibility. We also extend our thanks to the 9/11 Commissioners and staff, whose tireless work and cogent recommendations are the focus of today's hearing.

But most of all, we thank the American people for their interest and support of this process. Hundreds of thousands have purchased the Commission's report. Tens of millions have accessed the Commission's website, to read for themselves the summary of what went wrong on September 11th and what we need to do as a nation to correct those failings. Millions more will watch these hearings.

Those astonishing numbers make it very clear that it can no longer be "business as usual" in Washington. This Committee's presence here today is testament to that. There is no recess from terrorism. Because of the transparent way the Commission operated and the accessibility of their report in bookstores and on the Internet, ordinary citizens are now well-informed about the failures of our national security apparatus. And they are engaging in the much-needed debate about how our government must change so that those failures never happen again. This is democracy- alive, and at work.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, the roadmap is in front of you. There are 41 recommendations contained in the 9/11 Commission's report. Neither the Family Steering Committee nor the American people will let these recommendations suffer the same fate as those of past Commissions. There is no shelf on which they can be hidden. You, and the rest of Congress, are very much in the spotlight, and will be held accountable for your actions- or inaction, as will the White House. Elected officials who obstruct passage of these recommendations will have to answer to their constituents. To help this oversight- the people's oversight- the Family Steering Committee will make the progress of legislation, Executive Orders and agency initiatives available on our website. We will list Co-Sponsors on bills, as well as who voted 'for' or 'against'. Our hope is that legislation will be passed by unanimous consent after expedited hearings before the end of this year.

As this process moves forward, we challenge you- election year notwithstanding - to resist the pressure from lobbyists who oppose reforms that add costs to their clients' operations. We respectfully require that every bill dealing with these recommendations mandate specific implementation steps and timetables and avoid the delays that characterize the regulatory route. The families who worked so hard for aviation safety improvements after the Lockerbie tragedy in 1988 understand this need all too well.

We also require language in each bill that addresses funding, and that appropriations promptly follow. We respectfully require that the bills submitted to Congress be unencumbered by amendments - the 'pork' that so often is associated with controversial legislation. Lastly, we challenge the House and Senate to work together to draft complimentary bills, so that there will be no need for conferencing behind closed doors.

The reforms needed to build a more secure nation must not be derailed. Nearly three years have passed since our nation's security was catastrophically breached. Because of partisan gridlock and bureaucratic intransigence, far too little has been done since then to make us safer. During the 9/11 hearings, we heard from agency after agency that corrective measures had been implemented, only to learn from incidents reported in the news that security lapses are still rampant.

The Commission report speaks of a "failure of imagination" in Washington - a failure to understand the threat of terrorism and respond to it. Going forward, we need government officials who *do* have imagination - who can implement legislation that is creative, responsive and capable of addressing the challenges and threats of the 21st century. A National Counter-Terrorism Center, and a Director of National Intelligence at the helm with 'the power of the purse', is at the heart of the Commission's recommendations. Yesterday the President announced his support for these 2 recommendations and also indicated the DNI would have the necessary budget control. This is a critical element. If it doesn't extend to the Defense Department's non-military intelligence operations, the effectiveness of the DNI will be largely undermined. Be assured we will be monitoring this important aspect.

The report identifies Congress itself as being dysfunctional. We therefore call upon each of you to have the courage to be part of the solution, and embrace fundamental change in the way the Congressional committee oversight system operates.

As in the days preceding the 9/11 attacks, the threat level now is high. This Committee, Congress and the President must act with great urgency. Upcoming elections must not overshadow these initiatives. These recommendations require your undivided attention. The American people will accept nothing less. And whatever the outcome in November, we expect that you, our representatives, will use your full terms of office productively. We can ill-afford a 'lame duck' attitude to legislation at this critical time. We fully support a special session of Congress to ensure that the momentum generated by these hearings will continue.

My husband Sean was trapped in the South Tower of the World Trade Center on September 11th but was able to reach me by phone. When the smoke and flames drew near and Sean knew he was going to die, he remained calm, speaking of his love for me and for his family. I will forever be in awe of the way he faced those final moments. In the days that followed, I felt somehow infused with his courage and strength, and that helped me persevere through the difficult months that followed. So many other family members were similarly inspired. Despite our private anguish, we shared a goal - to make this country safer so that the deaths of 3,000 people would not be meaningless.

Too many of us lost someone we cherished on September 11th. Too many of us also lost our faith in a government we had blindly trusted to protect the people we loved. After September 11th, the

country reached out to the families and asked what they could do to help us heal. We now have an answer: “Help us make these recommendations happen”. And our question to Congress, the President and this Committee is: “Are you willing to implement reforms, before this year is ended, and thereby restore our nation’s faith in its government?”

The anniversary of September 11th approaches. What better way to honor the memory of those who perished than by enacting legislation this year which ensures that no other family member has to experience what we have endured.

I hope I never see the day when another widow has to walk in my shoes. The time to act is now.
Thank you.

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