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9/11 report brought intelligence reforms

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WASHINGTON — Today marks the first anniversary of the independent 9/11 Commission's report on the 2001 attacks that killed more than 3,000 people and changed the course of the nation.

Over the past year, the report, its authors and the survivors who pushed relentlessly for its completion have secured the second major reorganization of the government since 9/11 and the biggest reform of the intelligence community in 50 years.

Today, the new director of national intelligence, John Negroponte, holds sole accountability for the operation of the nation's disparate agencies that gather and analyze intelligence, aiming to replace the mantra of "need to know." While they have moved a mountain, relatives of 9/11 victims note that the commission issued not one, but 41 other recommendations. Further, some argue that Congress and the executive branch have done little in the past year to make the nation safer than it was four years ago.

Mindy Kleinberg of East Brunswick, N.J., whose husband Alan died at the World Trade Center on 9/11, pointed to the apparent ease with which terrorists killed 56 in London July 7 as evidence we are no safer, if not less safe here.

"Mass transit is not secure. Our ports are not secure. Nuclear power plants are not secure. Chemical plants are not secure. I don't know what number of people have to die before we say this is important," Kleinberg said.

Kleinberg and Monica Gabrielle of West Haven, plan to return to Capitol Hill today for a Democratic-led forum on the first anniversary of the report.

While they have gone separate ways in the past year, Gabrielle and Mary Fetchet of New Canaan, founding director of Voices of September 11th, were among the core group of relatives who lobbied ceaselessly for establishment of the commission.

Fetchet, whose 24-year-old son Brad died at the World Trade Center, said the top unanswered recommendations commission include dedication of radio frequency spectrum for first responders, reform of congressional oversight, and empowerment of the government's Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board to monitor the war on terror.

The House of Representatives was expected to vote late Thursday to authorize 2001's Patriot Act. The House Rules Committee denied floor consideration of an amendment co-authored by U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-4, that would have increased funding for the panel, required that it be bipartisan, and provided it subpoena power.

Members of the 9/11 Commission who lobbied for the intelligence reform legislation, co-authored by U.S. Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, D-Conn. cast its success as a miracle. Fetchet says she wasn't surprised by its success.

"I don't know that I was surprised. I was exhausted. If someone had told me the amount of time and energy it would have taken to push through those reforms, I don't know who would have taken on the task," Fetchet said.

Relatives like Peter Gadiel of Kent, whose son Jamie died at the World Trade Center, remain entirely unsatisfied with security reforms since 9/11, in particular failures to stem illegal immigration.

Gadiel accuses lawmakers including Lieberman of laxity on illegal immigration. During his 2004 presidential campaign, Lieberman proposed one-time "earned legalization" for immigrants who obeyed the law and paid taxes.

"Joe Lieberman has apparently never seen a single restriction on illegal immigration that he will support," Gadiel said, accusing Lieberman of being "utterly incompetent" and "spitting in the face of the members of the families of the victims of 9/11."

In response, Lieberman asserted progress has been made, while much more work remains.

"Americans are more secure today than they were almost four years ago. ... But our work is not done. We need strong and persistent leadership to make sure the new reforms are carried out," Lieberman said, asserting that he "will continue to advocate for greater unity of effort in everything the federal government does to thwart terrorism and for more resources for our homeland defense."

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