

Statement of

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Mother of 24 year-old, Bradley James Fetchet

who perished in the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001

before the

United States House of Representatives Subcommittee

on National Security,

Emerging Threats and International Relations Hearing

Hearing on 9/11 Commission Recommendations:

Balancing Civil Liberties and Security

Tuesday, June 6, 2006

Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Kucinich, members of this distinguished committee. It is an honor to appear before you today and to provide testimony at this vitally important hearing.

My name is Mary Fetchet. I am Founding Director of Voices of September 11th, a 9/11 family advocacy group I founded after the death of my 24 year old son Brad. My husband Frank, who was unable to attend today is also submitting testimony. Thank you from both of us. My goal today is to advocate for something I feel strongly about – creating the proper balance between increased security in a post 911 environment and preserving our sacred civil liberties. I am also here to ask for Congress' help in implementing the 9/11 Commission recommendations.

September 11th was a defining moment in the history of our country that changed how we view the safety of our families and our nation. Along with nearly 3,000 families, my family suffered a tragic loss, the loss of our wonderful son Brad. Since his death, I view my life in two chapters, before September 11th and after September 11th. Unfamiliar with the political system I naively believed our government was performing its fundamental duty to protect its citizens. Like many Americans, my sense of security and my faith in our government's effectiveness was shattered on September 11th.

My introduction to Washington began on July, 2002 when I spoke at a rally to support legislation proposed to create a 9/11 Commission. Over the next three years I made many trips - too many to count - to Washington along with a handful of family members. As victims family members we brought

the human face and the voices of the victims to the terrorism policy debate. Although we met roadblocks on every level of government, through a bipartisan effort of like-minded members of Congress and with the help of the 9/11 Commissioners we succeeded in passing the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

Tragically, nearly 2 years after legislation was signed, these reforms have not been fully implemented and over half of the recommendations have not been legislated. (See [Report Card](#) on the progress of the Commission recommendations)

Government has a fundamental responsibility to protect its citizens and there can be no debate that our government failed us on 9/11. Yet, despite the ongoing threat of another more serious terrorist attack, nuclear, biological or chemical, the government is moving too slowly. I feel strongly that the 9/11 Commission's final report, set a comprehensive framework for long-overdue sweeping government reform. The recommendations must be embraced in their totality, not implemented in a piecemeal fashion. It is my opinion that currently we are handpicking some, but not all, of the recommendations which jeopardizes their effectiveness and creates an imbalance in the system. Clearly this situation has occurred with regard to balancing increased security and establishing a civil liberties board.

BALANCING INCREASED SECURITY AND PROTECTING CIVIL LIBERTIES

The reauthorization of the Patriot Act and the expansion of wartime powers makes it easier for America's counter-terrorism services to gather intelligence. Yet progress on creating a civil liberties to supervise these powers has been painfully slow, with delays in the confirmation process, limited funding and staff. The board has been slow to meet and lacks the necessary independence and subpoena power to investigate potential civil liberties violations. Establishing a "toothless" board only creates an illusion that our civil liberties are being protected and perpetuates an environment for controversy and partisan debates around the misuse of powers. Recent news reports raise serious questions about violations that should be investigated. But without a robust, independent civil liberties board there is little hope that these potential violations will be appropriately investigated. I believe the civil liberties board should be empowered to protect against the violation of the fundamental principles of our democracy.

INTEROPERABILITY

On 9/11 over 600 individuals needlessly died in the South tower of the World Trade Center buildings, the second building hit by an airplane. My son Brad was one of them. The occupants of the building were ordered to remain in their offices and individuals attempting to evacuate were sent back up to their offices. On 9/11 hundreds of lives could have been saved if the first responders were able to communicate accurate information to the occupants of the building.

I was shocked to learn interoperability was identified as a problem in a GAO report in 1995, but Congress neglected to address the issue. Although

progress has been made in setting a deadline to allocate additional radio spectrum. Congress must now realistically evaluate the monies required to convert systems nationally and ensure an operating system is coordinated when the spectrum is available.

INFORMATION SHARING

The 9/11 Commission report concluded that key information was not shared between and amongst government agencies, allowing the 9/11 plot to escape detection. The December, 2004 intelligence legislation sought to remedy that failure by creating the position of program manager. Recent government reviews have been highly critical of the state of information sharing and have indicated that almost 5 years later the status has not greatly improved. We hear complaints from state and local authorities that have chosen to operate independently because they are not being included in receiving key information. For example, in New York City the NYPD created their own counterterrorism intelligence capability and have established relationships with foreign countries. Without a coordinated effort to share information on the local, state and federal level we remain vulnerable today.

CONGRESSIONAL REFORM

Congress has little choice but to tackle oversight reform if the 9/11 legislation is to succeed. If you look at the organizational chart of the 108th Congress ([click link to see chart](#)), everyone is in charge so no one is in

charge. As you can see most congressional committees have some jurisdiction over homeland security, making the current system prone to turf battles and inertia. Simply put, the current system is dangerously dysfunctional and undermines America's ability to prevent terrorist attacks at home or abroad. Streamlining the number of committees may be a long, painful process but is necessary to ensure proper oversight and accountability. Congress must reform itself to provide the focus and transparent oversight required by the American people.

AFGHANISTAN

Voices of September 11th facilitated a cultural exchange project with an organization sponsoring two girl schools in Badakhshan, Afghanistan. We were notified that several schools had to close their doors due to direct threats to their students and a general state of unpredictability and unrest. Although Afghanistan has made great progress since the Taliban was defeated, we are very concerned about recent reports of anti-American riots and an increase in insurgents. We have a responsibility in a narrowing window of time to create an infrastructure and cultivate an ally in the war against terrorism. In addition, it's shocking that nearly 5 years after 9/11 Osama Bin Laden and his generals are still at large with no clear plan or sense of urgency to capture them. Has our government forgotten its responsibility to bring them to justice?

CONCLUSION

Our country came together on 9/11 with a unified promise that “we will never forget”. I am told that Congress stood together on the steps of the Capitol and vowed to work together. However, I have am troubled by the partisanship, turf battles and the agendas of special interest groups that are preventing implementation of these 9/11 recommendations.

Our families have no alternative than to live with the constant reminder of the horrific nature of the death of our loved ones. My husband and I have been notified of bone fragments of Brad’s remains on 5 occasions and have received only a small portion of his body. I cannot begin to convey to you difficult this is. After having suffered this horrific loss and have to repeatedly travel to Washington to convince our government officials to make the safety of our country a priority. Yet I am here again today to act as your conscience and once again put a human face on the victims that lost loved ones on 9/11...and to ask for your support in implementing the 9/11 Commission recommendations.

I want to again thank Chairman Shays, Governor Kean and Representative Lee Hamilton personally for their unwavering support. I am forever indebted to them for their steadfast commitment to our country. Through Voices of September 11th I commit to provide ongoing support for those impacted by 9/11 and to continue to advocate for implementation of the 9/11 Commission reforms. I challenge each of you to make that same commitment. Make the 9/11 commission recommendations a priority in the upcoming election debates and educate your constituents about the sense of urgency. America

needs your leadership and determination. The future of our families and the safety of our nation ultimately rests in your hands.

Thank you.