

**Remarks by Lee H. Hamilton  
Presentation of a Special Achievement Award  
To the Staff of the 9/11 Commission  
By the American Society of Public Administration  
National Capital Area Chapter  
April 20, 2005**

Thank you, Paul, for your kind introduction. I also want to thank the Capital Area Chapter of the American Society of Public Administration, and its president Tish Tucker; Government Executive magazine and its editor Tim Clark; and IBM Consulting Services for hosting tonight's awards event.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge Governor Tom Kean, who chaired the 9/11 Commission. He provided outstanding leadership for the Commission. We worked together very closely. We developed a strong partnership and friendship. Governor Kean could not be here today. He is concluding his work as President of Drew University and so it is a very busy time for him. When the American Society for Public Administration decides to establish a Hall of Fame for Public Servants, Tom Kean will be elected on the first ballot.

I am here this evening on behalf of the Chair, but also on behalf of my fellow Commissioners: Richard Ben-Veniste, Fred Fielding, Jamie Gorelick, Slade Gorton, Bob Kerrey, John Lehman, Tim Roemer and Jim Thompson. They are extraordinary Americans of great stature and accomplishment. We needed all of their diverse talents. At crucial moments, each Commissioner made an indispensable contribution to our collective work.

The Commissioners, of course, take responsibility for the content of the report. Yet, as anyone in this town knows, you are only as good as the staff you bring to the task.

The staff were just exceptional. Several of my fellow Commissioners told me that in all their years in Washington, they had never seen a better staff. One Commissioner told Ambassador Negroponte last week that the 9/11 Commission staff is a national treasure – and indeed they are.

## **What the Staff Did**

Under the direction of Executive Director Phil Zelikow, Deputy Director Chris Kojm, General Counsel Dan Marcus and his Deputy Steve Dunne, the staff:

- Reviewed over 2 million pages of documents;
- Conducted over 1200 interviews, including every senior national security official of the past two Administration;
- Traveled and met senior officials in 10 countries;
- Prepared 19 days of hearings with over 160 witnesses;
- Wrote 17 statements of fact to introduce each of the hearings; and
- Drafted 13 chapters of the final report, accompanied by over 1700 footnotes; and
- Prepared the 41 recommendations included in the final report.

The Commissioners worked intensively on the final report and recommendations – and so did the staff.

Every chapter drafted by staff had at least 3 reviews and edits by Commissioners. The chapters on policy had 6 reviews by Commissioners. I am not sure we kept track, but there were probably double that number of editing sessions by the staff. So, some chapters were reviewed 20 times. These were not quick read-throughs. Each editing session typically lasted six hours. The longest, I think, was about 14 hours.

So, the work load was unrelenting. The pressure was intense. Average work weeks of 60 hours ramped upward to 120 hour work weeks before we finished. We didn't pay too much attention to the normal job descriptions of federal civil servants. We were probably paying below the minimum wage when calculated on an hourly basis. I guess we are fortunate in retrospect that we didn't have lawsuits filed against us!

We asked the staff to do extraordinary things. Time and again, after lengthy discussions among the Commissioners – and with

the result anything but clear – a Commissioner would say, “Well, the staff can write it up.” And to my amazement, they did. They met, and exceeded, our expectations time and time again.

## **Who is the Staff?**

Who made up this remarkable staff?

Tom and I insisted that the staff be professional, non-partisan, and committed. Before hiring we inquired not about their politics, but about their competence.

The Commission had a huge, sprawling mandate – everything from foreign policy and covert action to airline and border security; everything from communications between the FAA and NORAD to communications between police and firefighters at the World Trade Center.

The Commission needed talent across many areas of expertise – and we got it. Everyone in America remembers exactly where they were and what they doing when they heard about the 9/11 attacks. So, just as there was an outpouring of assistance after 9/11, the Commission, too, received a flood of resumes from citizens, inside and outside the government, who wanted to help us with our work.

We had staff who had served in the White House, on the National Security Council staff, and in the Departments of State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, and Energy. We had FBI special agents and CIA officers. We had Congressional staffers and military officers. We had federal prosecutors and distinguished professors. We had budget analysts and investigators. We had some two dozen attorneys.

We had a former Federal Air Marshal, an NYPD officer, and an historian whose last assignment had been the Spy Museum

We had an immigration inspector and a private eye who had been a postal inspector.

We had a CIA officer whose last assignment for the previous 15 months had been running operations in Afghanistan.

We had a former Deputy Director for Intelligence at the CIA.

We had a former Attorney General of New Jersey, and a sitting Deputy Attorney General of the State of New York.

In many cases, staff connections to 9/11 were wrenching, and intensely personal.

One of our family liaison officers, Ellie Hartz, lost her husband on 9/11. The other, Emily Walker, had been able to escape safely from WTC Building Seven.

Two other staff in our New York office lost family and loved ones.

One of our staffers, Kevin Shaeffer – who is with us tonight – had been working at the Naval Command Center in the Pentagon the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, tracking events unfolding in New York. When Flight 77 struck the Pentagon, everyone in his section was killed. Kevin nearly died, and signed his military retirement papers to improve benefits for his family. Kevin survived, and underwent months of rehabilitation and skin grafts. His first day on the job with us was March 11, 2003 eighteen months after the attack. He was hired to work on the review of the emergency response in New York, and the emergency response at the Pentagon that had saved his life. He signs all of his e-mails: “Never Forget.” His dedication to the work of the Commission inspired us all.

## **What Did We Accomplish?**

What exactly did the Commission and its staff accomplish? Did we fulfill our purpose?

Basically, we had two tasks:

- First, to tell the story of 9/11: the facts and circumstances surrounding the attacks of September 11;
- Second, to make recommendations, to make our country safer and more secure.

Telling the Story. As to the first question, We fulfilled our task. We told the story of September 11<sup>th</sup>. We had unparalleled access to documents and to witnesses. We placed an unprecedented amount of classified material into the public record. We told the story of the hijackers. We told stories of covert actions. We cited missed opportunities to disrupt the plot. We corrected false stories about FAA and NORAD on the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>. We put to rest many theories of conspiracy. We told stories of heroism, on Flight 93 and in the Towers of the World Trade Center.

We do not know what future evidence historians will uncover. But we know that we saw every document we asked for. We know that all future accounts of 9/11 will build on the one we have written.

Surely, for the present, the 9/11 Commission Report -- which for a while was keeping pace with Harry Potter in book sales -- is the definitive account of 9/11.

Making recommendations. We made 41 recommendations. Congress has acted on a number of them, most notably the intelligence reform act signed into law by the President in December.

That law created, as we recommended, a Director of National Intelligence, a National Counterterrorism Center, and a Privacy and Civil Liberties Board. It carried out several of our border and transportation security recommendations. It spoke favorably, if not substantively, about several of our recommendations in "sense of Congress" language.

### **Unfinished business**

Much, however, remains to be done.

No law is self-executing. We will need to pay close attention and monitor the creation of new institutions in the Intelligence Community, and the implementation of the statute.

Our chief disappointment was failing to persuade the Congress to reform its own institutions. We proposed, and Congress and the President created, strong authorities in the Executive branch. We also need strong authorities in the Congress to serve as a check and balance on the Executive. Congress needs to conduct robust oversight, as a watchdog and a partner in helping the President carry out reform.

There is too much overlapping jurisdiction in the Congress. Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff has to report to some four score committees and subcommittees. When you report to eighty bosses, you cannot possibly get consistent guidance and direction.

Because of overlapping jurisdiction, the intelligence and homeland security committees are weak. They need exclusive jurisdiction. Strong committees are necessary to perform effective oversight.

We believe that there can be strong and effective oversight of intelligence and homeland security in the Congress if the responsibility in each case rests with four – not four score – committees. There should be two authorization committees, one in the House and one in the Senate, and two appropriations subcommittees, one in the House and one in the Senate, for intelligence and homeland security respectively.

Not only reform in the Congress has been left undone.

Several other recommendations we made still require action.

We believe there should be homeland security funding formulas based on threat and risk, not based on general revenue sharing.

We believe that first responders must have reliable communications systems. Public safety should have priority access to the broadcast spectrum.

We believe there needs to be more focus on the Commission's recommendations on:

- foreign policy;
- public diplomacy initiatives on broadcasting and educational exchanges;
- and non-proliferation, especially support for the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, to keep nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists.

### **Why Public Service**

So I want to come back to the original question before us: Why are we here tonight? We are here tonight not to exhaustively review the work of the 9/11 Commission, but to honor a remarkable set of men and women who labored mightily, with great dedication, and set the gold standard for all future Commissions.

Everyone whom we honor tonight – and everyone in this room - understands the many dispiriting aspects of public life. All the political posturing, sniping and scrambles to claim credit for good things – or avoid blame for bad – can become disheartening. So does the constant maneuvering for partisan advantage. And for putting up with all of this, each of you got paid less than you could make in the private sector.

Yet despite it all, each staff member sought out the opportunity to work for the Commission. Each was chosen because he or she was very good at what they do.

Let's be frank – some of it satisfied the ego. When the Commission spoke, people listened. That is very satisfying in a town full of people that want to be heard.

Yet most of you, I think, were truly motivated by the belief that, as hard as it is, you could do something to enhance the lives of ordinary Americans.

You shared the view, I think, that our days are for something more than making money and having a good time, although both of those are important. You believed that we have obligations that extend beyond ourselves. You believed that public service is a stimulating, proud enterprise, and that its call is one of the highest you will hear or the country can make.

Then, too, it was all pretty exciting – and interesting. Part of the challenge of public service is the sheer excitement of wrestling with the great public policy challenges of the day. Telling the story, and examining the multiple policy issues, attracted you.

You had a pervasive sense that you were sorting out a momentous event in the history of this country.

You deemed it an opportunity, indeed even a privilege, to struggle over the issues that aroused the passions of this country's founding generation. How should we provide for the common defense? How much power should the Executive be given? How should powers be separated among the branches? How do we resolve the tension between individual liberty and security? What role should our country play in the world?

## **Conclusion**

So I salute each of you for the vital role that you played on the Commission, and for your service to your fellow Americans.

You made a contribution to the success and future direction of this country. I trust you felt that by working on the Commission you were given the unique opportunity, and you seized the opportunity, to make a difference in the lives of people and the great affairs of this nation.

I would wager that no matter where your career takes you from the Commission, you will look back on this moment of public service

as one of the most rewarding, if not the most rewarding, of your career. One day you will say to your children or grandchildren, "this was my finest hour."

The work was hard, the monetary reward modest, and apart from tonight, recognition for each of you has been scant. But your reward is a deeply fulfilling contribution to public service, to the common good, and our American democracy. What more could you want?

At this time I would like to recognize and call upon Dan Marcus, General Counsel, to accept this Special Achievement Award on behalf of the staff of the 9/11 Commission.