



Security reforms? Washington isn't in any rush

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By **MIKE KELLY**

WASHINGTON - Bill Studeman is no ordinary spy.

As a Navy admiral who became the second-ranking official at the CIA a decade ago, he learned firsthand the difficulties of changing vast government bureaucracies. But as Studeman finished his presentation Monday in the second of eight summer seminars on anti-terrorist reforms sponsored by Tom Kean's former 9/11 commission, he paused near the door to predict how long it will take to retool America's 15 spy agencies.



"My guess is that it will take 10 years," Studeman said.

That brings us to 2015. That's 14 years after the 9/11 attacks and what was supposed to be a wake-up call for America.

That's some wake-up.

Maybe the rest of America expected great changes after the 9/11 attacks and especially after last summer's wide-ranging set of proposals by Kean's bipartisan panel to transform America's fight against terrorism. But a sad reality, as inevitable as Washington's summer humidity, has now set in - that forcing the languid U.S. spy bureaucracy to alter its pace will take time, maybe as long as 10 years.

Imagine if General Motors told shareholders that it needed a decade to put itself back on track. Here in Washington, time-oriented goals of the business world seem as far away as Afghanistan.

Indeed, an unsettling theme emerging in these summer seminars by the Kean commission, now dubbed the 9/11 Public Discourse Project, is how bureaucratic inertia may turn out to be as vexing as terrorism itself. But is Washington really sweating this?

Consider Studeman's responses when he was asked how much time it would take to fix U.S. intelligence. He began by comparing current spy reform efforts with those in the late 1940s, when the federal government established the CIA and other agencies to gear up for the intelligence needs of the Cold War. Studeman said it took "10 to 20" years for all those changes to evolve.

"We haven't got that kind of time," he said. "The intelligence community has got to do this quickly."

But "quickly," to him, means a decade.

Such a response underscores just how profoundly different Washington is from the rest of America. In this city, the passage of 10 years for instituting reforms is considered evidence of speed.

"This is not an output-driven culture," said John Lehman, the Navy secretary in the Reagan administration and the 9/11 commissioner who led Monday's seminar. "It's obsessed with process rather an output."

Translation: The process is slow.

Afterward, Lehman winced and shook his head as he weighed the dangers from waiting too long to change intelligence-gathering agencies.

"They're trapped in a process that is overwhelming," he said. "There are going to be winners and losers. And the losers are not going to go quietly into the night."

Besides intelligence reforms, the Kean commission is trying to sound the alarm about other basic problems, too, from the possibility of terrorists gaining access to nuclear weapons to the need to allocate Homeland Security funds to the most vulnerable towns and cities. Today, Kean and 9/11 commission Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton plan to announce their support for a plan by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., to give police and fire agencies access to a common emergency radio frequency.

But even if McCain's proposal gets through Congress and is signed into law, the suggested deadline for establishing such a radio frequency is more than three years away - not exactly evidence that anyone is in huge rush to get things done.

Maybe this is why Mary Fetchet, a Connecticut social worker whose son died at the World Trade Center on 9/11, also found herself wincing and shaking her head Monday.

"They're bogged down in bureaucracy," Fetchet said.

Bogged down. Maybe it's the new American way.

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