

## 9/11 study calls for refocused vigilance

Watchdogs: Group that issued the original 9/11 report says the government is getting lax

By Matt Canham

The Salt Lake Tribune

November 7, 2005

Intelligence holes. Unregulated borders. Lax cargo screening.

The United States may be more equipped to prevent a terrorist attack than it was before Sept. 11, 2001, but as time grinds on the drive to continue bolstering homeland security dwindles.

"The sense of urgency has diminished," said Chris Kojm, president of the 9/11 Public Discourse Project, the nonprofit offshoot of the government-created 9/11 Commission.

Kojm and the other Public Discourse Project members are attempting to refocus the people, and especially the politicians, on reforming all aspects of federal and local intelligence gathering, transportation security and emergency response.

As part of this effort, Kojm, the former deputy director of the commission, will provide an update on government efforts stemming from the non-partisan 9/11 Commission recommendations at the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics early Tuesday.

"Governments have many priorities, many distractions that carry senior officials in different directions," he said. "Reform is hard and takes constant attention from senior officials."

And lately, the distractions have been many, from the war in Iraq to the appointments of new Supreme Court judges to federal indictments of high-powered politicians.

While all areas are worthy of public scrutiny, Kojm doesn't want the government to forget one of its basic roles - to keep people safe.

The commission released its 567-page official report on July 22, 2004. Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act later that year, which included many of the commission's most pressing recommendations.

But when the commission disbanded in August 2004, the 10 members felt they could continue applying pressure to ensure the president and Congress followed through.

To that end, the Public Discourse Project was born. The project has recently released report cards on its recommendations. With the last, focusing on foreign policy and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to be published Nov. 14.



Chris Kojm

The first two reports examined federal progress in reforming government institutions and in strengthening homeland security.

So far no area has received a passing grade.

The basic finding: Change has begun but the behemoth bureaucracies have resisted it and slowed progress.

Kojm points to Congress as one area of particular concern.

"Congress has been reluctant to reform itself," he said.

The commission recommended that Congress create intelligence committees with broad oversight power, including control of the budgets for intelligence agencies such as the CIA and FBI. The House and Senate have only taken small steps toward this goal and have refused the commission's recommendation to make the intelligence budget public.

"Some secrecy is necessary for our security; unnecessary concealment of information from the American people is not," said the Oct. 20 report card on government institutions.

The commission argues that basic information about the budget will give the public and most members of Congress necessary information to judge whether the funds are being spent wisely.

To provide the United States with all reasonable protections against future attacks, politicians need to block out distractions, Kojm said.

"They clearly get pulled and tugged in many directions and that is understandable," Kojm said. "But they need to regain focus."

The report cards are accessible on the 9/11 Public Discourse Project's Web site at <http://www.9-11pdp.org>. Kojm will address the Hinckley Institute at 9 a.m. Tuesday. It is open to the public.

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