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Congress of the United States
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COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

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June 28, 2002

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Director
Office of Homeland Security
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Governor Ridge:

Thank you for testifying before the House Committee on Government Reform last Thursday regarding the Administration's proposal to create a new Department of Homeland Security. We support the President's call for enhanced focus on homeland security, and we believe reorganizing federal agencies will be a key component of this process. As you know, the Committee on Government Reform will play an integral role in Congress' consideration of the President's proposal. We have unique jurisdiction spanning virtually all federal agencies, and we have held over two dozen hearings on precisely this issue — the organization of the federal government to most effectively and efficiently counter the threat of terrorism.

As the Committee begins its consideration of the legislative language presented by the Administration, a number of questions have arisen. The most significant of these is the manner in which the President's reorganization proposal relates to an overarching strategy for homeland defense. On October 15, 2001, a bipartisan group of members from the Committee wrote to President Bush that your appointment "provides an important opportunity to address one of the most serious shortcomings in our national security policy: the lack of a national strategy based on a comprehensive threat and risk assessment."[1]

That letter noted that the U.S. Commission on National Security, a bipartisan group headed by former Senators Warren Rudman and Gary Hart, found that "no overarching strategic

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[1]Letter to President George W. Bush from Chairman Dan Burton, Ranking Member Henry Waxman, Chairman Christopher Shays, and Ranking Member Dennis Kucinich (Oct. 15, 2001).

framework guides U.S. national security policymaking or resource allocations."[2] In addition, the letter cited similar findings by a panel headed by Governor James Gilmore, which concluded that "the United States has no coherent, functional national strategy for combating terrorism."[3]

In creating your office, President Bush wisely recognized that developing a national strategy was the first step in the fight against terrorists. In the executive order creating your position, he set forth the core mission of your office:

> The mission of the Office shall be to develop and implement the coordination of a comprehensive national strategy to secure the United States from terrorist threats or attacks.[4]

When you assumed your position, you recognized that developing this strategy was your top assignment, calling it your "main mission"[5] and your "very first mission."[6] In a speech last April, you said, "I take every word of that executive order seriously," and you promised that the strategy would be "guided by an overarching philosophy: risk management — focusing our resources where they will do the most good, and achieve the maximum protection of lives and property."[7]

We wholeheartedly agree with this approach. Unfortunately, the Committee still has not received the strategy, and as a result, we do not have a list of priorities set forth in a clear way, and we cannot gauge whether your reorganization proposal best serves the nation's security

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[2]The United States Commission for National Security/21st Century, *Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change* (Mar. 15, 2001).

[3]Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Toward a National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (Second Annual Report)* (Dec. 15, 2000).

[4]Executive Order 13228.

[5]*Ridge Says Focus is on Expanding Homeland Security Resources,* Speech at Homeland Security Conference, U.S. Department of State (Washington, DC) (on line at http://usinfo.state.gov).

[6]*Tom Ridge Speaks to the Associated Press Annual Luncheon,* Office of the White House Press Secretary (Apr. 29, 2002) (available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020429-3.html).

[7]*Id.*

goals. During our hearing on Thursday, we asked you why the national strategy had not yet been completed. You replied that "there was no timeframe specifically directed by the President," and that "the executive order did not establish a date by which it should be completed."[8] You did say, however, that you hoped to present the strategy for the President's approval in July.

This approach is misguided. The commissions and expert panels mentioned above recommended that reform begin with a national strategy that then drives reorganization decisions, rather than the other way around. If the President has not yet approved the national strategy, as you indicated at the hearing, it is difficult to understand how the reorganization proposal fits into it.[9]

At the hearing, members asked why the Administration proposed the agency reorganization before issuing the national strategy. You replied that Congress has seen the "underpinnings" of the strategy and its scope.[10] Your answers suggested that the Administration has a "working" strategy. You stated that "in fact, the strategy and pieces of the strategy have been emerging, have been shared with Congress."[11] To the contrary, this Committee has been provided with nothing that resembles a national strategy.

You later stated that the principles of the national strategy have been evident "ever since the President sent up his 2003 budget initiative."[12] You made the following statement:

> I think I can take you through the President's budget proposal in 2003, and show you how it ties into this, the reorganization which is very much part of the strategy. So it is in

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[8]House Committee on Government Reform, *Hearing on The Department of Homeland Security: An Overview of the President's Proposal* (June 20, 2002) (stenographic record).

[9]Others have been more critical. *See* Alexis Simendinger, Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., and Siobhan Gorman, *Bush's Homeland Gambit,* National Journal (June 15, 2002) (quoting John R. Brinkerhoff, civil defense director at FEMA under President Reagan: "The Bush Administration is doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons . . . . What worries me is that we've put the cart before the horse: we're organizing, and then we're going to figure out what to do").

[10]*Government Reform Committee Hearing, supra* note 8.

[11]*Id.*

[12]*Id.*

pieces of the strategy, the underpinnings have been out there. We will give it in a more complete document in a couple of weeks.[13]

This statement is hard to understand, especially because you proposed the agency reorganization after you submitted your budget proposal. The budget justifications for fiscal year 2003 included absolutely no information about the newly-proposed Department of Homeland Security. For you to assert that previously submitted budget documents reflect your national strategy is to ignore your proposal to create the new department.

For these reasons, it is imperative that you provide your national strategy as soon as possible, so the Committee will have the tools and information to appropriately consider your proposal for the new department. To assist us in this complex process, the national strategy should include the following minimum critical components:

- **Comprehensive Threat and Risk Assessment:** The U.S. General Accounting Office has concluded repeatedly that the basis for a national strategy must be a comprehensive analysis of the full spectrum of potential threats. Proceeding without such an assessment risks wasting limited resources on unlikely threats, while neglecting more likely dangers. The October 15, 2001, letter from members of the Committee recommended that you conduct exactly this type of assessment. We continue to believe, and GAO agrees, that this is a critical first step in developing a national strategy.[14]

- **Comprehensive and Specific Priorities:** The national strategy should set forth an established, precise, and comparative list of homeland security priorities in order of importance. They should be based on information and findings from the comprehensive threat and risk assessment. No doubt, this prioritization process will be difficult, especially given the diffuse, evolving, and global nature of various threats to the nation.

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[13] *Id.*

[14] *See* Testimony of Henry L. Hinton, Managing Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, U.S. General Accounting Office, before the Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations, *Hearing on Combating Terrorism: Protecting the United States* (Mar. 12, 2002) ("I don't know that I can add any more from what I said earlier and which was picked up in the letter — the bipartisan letter that went from this Committee over to the President — seeking a threat and risk assessment in this whole area to try to take stock of what the threats are and to come up with a balanced portfolio against those. So I think that's the process that needs to unfold, and that's been the subject of the recommendation and now reports where we are looking to the — Governor Ridge to oversee that process that will provide that information to help you all in your oversight capacity").

But only with a rational set of priorities developed through a full assessment of all threats to the homeland can a coherent approach be developed.

- **Concrete and Specific Approaches:** The heart of the national strategy should be a series of well constructed and well vetted approaches for dealing with each of the specific priorities and threats identified above. These approaches may include reorganizations, coordination proposals, operational protocols, and other measures that will most efficiently and effectively achieve the goals of the national strategy.

- **Performance Indicators and Measurements of Success:** An integral part of the national strategy should be a description of the concrete goals to be achieved and a way of measuring the federal government's progress toward those goals. The strategy should lay out these objectives in a clear way and should provide definitions, benchmarks, and performance measures as part of this process.

- **Budget Information Linked Directly to Strategy:** To date, the Committee has received no budget justifications regarding the proposed Department of Homeland Security. The national strategy not only should provide budget information relating to this enormous reorganization proposal, but it also should provide comprehensive budget information relating to the implementation of all of the national strategy's policies. This information should be directly linked to the priorities, approaches, and performance indicators, and it should provide a blueprint for future years' spending.

As we stated at the hearing, we support your efforts to improve homeland security and want to work with the Administration in a bipartisan manner. In order to assist the Committee in this pursuit, we request that you provide the comprehensive national strategy, with its component parts, by July 5, 2002. If some information that should be part of the national strategy is not available by that time, we would appreciate receiving it as soon thereafter as possible. In this way, we will be able to understand the substantive policies and goals driving this agency reorganization proposal.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member

Tom Lantos
Member of Congress

Major R. Owens
Member of Congress

Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress

Paul E. Kanjorski
Member of Congress

Patsy T. Mink
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