

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing
“Information Sharing: Connecting the Dots at the Federal, State and
Local Levels”
Washington, DC
July 23, 2008**

Good morning and welcome to today’s hearing: “Information Sharing: Connecting the Dots at the Federal, State and Local Levels.”

The attacks of 9-11 showed us how disastrous it can be when intelligence gathered by one agency is not shared with other agencies – federal, state and local – who share the responsibility to protect our nation and our people.

“The 9-11 Commission Report” documented instance after instance where various agencies either kept crucial information to themselves or, even if they were prepared to share information, did not let other agencies know they had it. Because of this information hoarding, crucial clues existing in different databases that if combined and analyzed might have thwarted the attacks were missed and the terrorists succeeded in the most devastating attack on the U.S. since Pearl Harbor.

The 9-11 Commission wrote in its report, “The culture of agencies feeling they own the information they gathered at taxpayers’ expense must be replaced by a culture in which the agencies instead feel they have a duty

to the information – to repay the taxpayers’ investment by making that information available.”

In today’s hearing we will examine progress on information sharing – what’s gotten better and what improvements are still needed? In fact, this is the first inquiry since 2004, our first round of post-9-11 hearings/

We have a panel of very distinguished witnesses, and I want to welcome you all here today and thank you for being here.

Charlie Allen, who is without question one of the most experienced and respected intelligence professionals in our government, I especially want to thank James “Skip” Thomas, the Commissioner of the Department of Homeland Security from Connecticut, who is here to talk about some of the very innovative work being done in my home state.

We also have Ambassador McNamara, Program Manager of the Information Sharing Environment, Jeffrey Smith former General Counsel of the CIA, who worked with our committee on the Intelligence Reform legislation, and Eileen Larence of GAO.

We are going to hear about significant progress over the past several years to improve the sharing of critical information across federal agencies, and between federal, state, and local agencies.

Following hearings of this Committee in 2004, Congress passed and the President signed into law “The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act,” which created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to forge great unity of effort among our nation’s very diverse intelligence community. The legislation also established the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and the office of the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment (ISE), both intended to strengthen and streamline the exchange of terrorism-related information within the federal government.

The 9/11 Commission Act, signed into law last year, further enhanced the authorities of the Information Sharing Environment program manager and established in statute the State and Local Fusion Center program office at DHS.

At the NCTC officials from a wide variety of agencies – CIA, FBI, NSA, DHS, DOD and many others – now work side-by-side, 24/7 to assess terrorism-related indications and warnings and analyze the terrorist threat. The NCTC is now the one place where our government is responsible for connecting the dots that were left dispersed prior to 9/11. It’s quite a remarkable achievement.

State and local governments are now also increasingly seen as partners by the federal government, and the network of fusion centers across the country, with support from the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security, is playing a valuable role in the broader efforts to share terrorism-related information and detect suspicious activities.

Just last month, fusion centers from Indiana and four other states collaborated on a joint assessment that looked at suspicious activities related to a certain sector of public infrastructure, acting on their own initiative.

This type of horizontal, decentralized information sharing and analysis is exactly the type of activity that fusion centers should be doing, and fixes one of the information sharing gaps that was evident as we looked back at the 9/11 plot, where federal agencies did not connect the dots regarding suspicious activities at flight schools around the country.

However, as we will discuss, much more work remains to be done to fulfill the 9-11 Commission's charge that that our security and intelligence agencies change from a culture of "need to know" to a culture of "need to share."

GAO has included this subject matter, which they call "Establishing Appropriate And Effective Information-Sharing Mechanisms to Improve Homeland Security," on its high-risk list since 2005 – which means that

risks of failure remain unacceptably high - and it is critical that all relevant agencies continue to work to remove this item from the high-risk list.

As we will hear from GAO, the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment needs to create a “road map” so it can objectively monitor progress, ensure accountability, and make participating agencies aware of their distinct responsibilities as part of the Information Sharing Environment.

Without that kind of a “road map,” we will not be able to identify and root out remaining cultural, organizational or technological barriers to effective information sharing that we know still exist.

We cannot allow the continuation of institutional “stovepipes” that funnel intelligence straight up a single agency. Rather, we need a decentralized, networked approach, one where information is broadly distributed.

Finally, we need to build on the progress that is being made. Unfortunately, there are some who would like to see the Information Sharing Environment program office defunded and disbanded by as early as 2010 and apparently then return to the old ways of doing business. I want to make clear my firm opposition to any such move.

Rather, I look forward to working with the next Administration in making this program so critical to our nation's security even more efficient and effective.