

Congressman Chris Bell
ASIS Speech 12.17.03

-THANK YOU MIKE FOR THE INTRODUCTION-

SINCE TAKING OFFICE THIS PAST JANUARY, HOMELAND SECURITY, THE WAR ON IRAQ AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST HAVE BEEN CONSTANTLY ON MY MIND AND MAKE UP A LARGE FOCUS OF THE DAILY WORK WE ARE DOING IN WASHINGTON. AS A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE AND THE GOVERNMENT REFORM SUBCOMITTEE ON TERRORISM, I HAVE

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PROBABLY BEEN EVEN MORE INVOLVED THAN MOST OF MY COLLEGAUES.

OVER THIS PAST YEAR, I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL TO ISRAEL, THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, INDIA, TURKEY, QATAR, JORDAN AND YES, EVEN INTO BAGHDAD.

I THINK WE ARE ALL CERTAINLY PLEASED THAT SADDAM HUSEIN WAS CAPTURED THIS PAST WEEK, AS WE SHOULD BE. IT WAS A MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR OUR MILITARY AND I AM PARTICULARLY PROUD THAT THE AMERICAN FORCES WHO NABBED SADDAM CALL TEXAS THEIR HOME, STATIONED JUST UP THE ROAD AT FORT HOOD NEAR SAN ANTONIO.

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BUT HAVING TRAVELED ALL OVER THE REGION AND HAVING SEEN FIRST HAND THE SUFFERING, CONFUSION, FEAR AND ANGER STILL PRESENT IN BAGHDAD, I CAN TELL YOU THAT WE STILL HAVE A LONG, LONG WAY TO GO.

SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE THAT THINGS ARE RETURNING TO NORMAL IN IRAQ AND THAT NOW, WITH SADDAM HUSEIN BEHIND BARS, WE SHOULD ACCELERATE OUR EFFORTS TO GET OUT OF IRAQ AND LET THE IRAQI PEOPLE GOVERN THEMSELVES.

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AND WHILE I BELIEVE THAT IS WHAT WE ALL WANT, AND CERTAINLY THE ONLY REASONABLE END TO THIS ENDEAVOR IN IRAQ, WE AS A NATION MUST BE PATIENT.

IRAQ, BAGHDAD IN PARTICULAR, IS STILL VERY UNSTABLE AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

WE CANNOT FORGET THE SAD LEGACY OF AMERICA'S PAST INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN DURING THE 1980'S. ONCE THE SOVIETS WERE EXPELLED WITH AMERICAN HELP, THE RAVAGED NATION WAS LEFT TO FEND FOR ITSELF AND FELL AT THE HANDS OF REGIONAL WARLORDS AND ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS.

THE PROMISES OF A BETTER TOMORROW FOR AFGHANISTAN MADE BY OUR GOVERNMENT WERE NEVER TO BE REALIZED WITHOUT OUR DIRECT INVOLVEMENT. THAT SITUATION, AND THE RESENTMENT THAT FOLLOWED, BECAME THE CATALYST FOR THE CREATION OF OSAMA BIN LADEN'S AL QUEDA AND ITS VIOLENT CAMPAIGN OF TERROR.

THE IMMEDIATE THREAT IN IRAQ MAY BE DIMINISHED, THE THREAT OF SADDAM HUSSEIN AND THE TERROR HE WAGED ON HIS PEOPLE IS A THING OF THE PAST. BUT THE DANGER OF INSTABILITY, ANARCHY, POVERTY AND EXTREMIST AND GUERILLA POLITICAL

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MOVEMENTS, WHICH HISTORY SHOWS BECOME THE BREEDING GROUND FOR MODERN DAY TERRORISM, THAT IS THE PROLOGUE WE ARE FACED WITH AS WE AMBLE INTO THE NEXT CHAPTER OF HISTORY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THAT IS THE CHALLENGE WE MUST OVERCOME.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH FOR US TO TOPPLE THE DICTATOR AND GO HOME VICTORIOUS. WE HAVE TO NATIONBUILD ON NO LESS OF A SCALE THAN WE DID IN EUROPE AFTER WORLD WAR II IF WE TRULY WANT TO MAKE AMERICA A SAFER PLACE.

IT IS NOT JUST A MATTER OF GOOD FOREIGN POLICY,OR AMERICA'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

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COMMUNITY, OR OUR REPUTATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THOUGH IT IS ABOUT ALL THOSE THINGS. MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, IT IS ABOUT OUR OWN HOMELAND SECURITY.

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO CREATE THE NEXT OSAMA BIN LADEN BECAUSE WE DIDN'T FOLLOW THROUGH ON OUR PROMISES TO THE IRAQI PEOPLE TO CREATE A SAFE, PEACEFUL AND FREE IRAQ.

THIS IS A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW FOR SOME AND IT CERTAINLY PUTS THE MAGNITUDE OF OUR COMMITMENT IN PERSPECTIVE.

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IT IS ALSO THE VERY REASON I HAVE
ADVOCATED FOR MORE INTERNATIONAL
INVOLVEMENT AND CONTROL IN IRAQ.

THE BURDEN IS TOO HEAVY, THE CHALLENGE
TOO GREAT FOR AMERICA AND ENGLAND TO
CONTINUE TO SHOULDER ON OUR OWN IN THE
COMING YEARS.

AT THIS POINT, IT IS ALMOST MOOT TO
CONSIDER WHETHER SADDAM HUSSEIN EVER
PRESENTED A REAL THREAT TO OUR NATIONAL
SECURITY OR WHETHER THIS WAR WAS THE
RIGHT THING OR THE WRONG THING.

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ONCE THE FIRST AMERICAN BOOT HIT THE GROUND IN BAGHDAD, THE STAKES WERE RAISED.

THAT IS WHY NOW MORE THAN EVER HOMELAND SECURITY IS SO IMPORTANT IN AMERICA.

AS A RESULT OF OUR NEW INVOLVEMENT IN AND OCCUPATION OF IRAQ, WE HAVE INCREASED THE PRESSURE ON OUR FIRST RESPONDERS AND HOMELAND SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE.

RIGHT OR WRONG, WE HAVE ESSENTIALLY RAISED THE STAKES FOR EVERYONE.

UNFORTUNATELY, TWO YEARS AND BILLIONS OF DOLLARS LATER, WE STILL HAVE SOME VERY SERIOUS SECURITY VULNERABILITES HERE AT HOME.

THAT IS WHY THIS PAST FEBRUARY I ANNOUNCED THE CREATION OF THE PORT SECURITY CAUCUS IN THE US CONGRESS.

SINCE THEN THE CAUCUS HAS GROWN FROM AN IDEA AND NOTHING MORE INTO AN ORGANIZATION OF OVER 100 MEMBERS IN BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS, WITH MEMBERSHIP CROSSING PARTY

LINES...MAKING IT ONE OF THE LARGEST CAUCUSES IN THE U.S. CONGRESS.

THIS CAUCUS REPRESENTS A TRUE BI-PARTISAN EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR PORT SECURITY IS ALLOCATED AND THAT LONG TERM STRATEGIES TO PROTECT AMERICA'S WATERWAYS ARE SOLIDLY IN PLACE.

I THINK THE WIDESPREAD SUPPORT OF OUR CAUCUS ON CAPITOL HILL SUGGESTS THAT MY COLLEAGUES ARE BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND THE EXTREME IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE FOR ALL AMERICANS.

I DON'T HAVE TO TELL ALL OF YOU HERE TODAY THAT AMERICA'S PORTS ARE OUR GATEWAYS OF COMMERCE TO THE WORLD.

EACH YEAR NEARLY SIX MILLION SEABORNE CONTAINERS ENTER OUR NATION'S PORTS, YET ONLY THREE PERCENT OF THE CARGO IS EVER PHYSICALLY INSPECTED.

THIS SECURITY GAP GIVES GROUPS LIKE AL-QUEDA MILLIONS OF OPPORTUNITIES EVERY YEAR TO SMUGGLE A NUCLEAR DEVICE OR WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION INTO THE UNITED STATES.

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IN TOTAL, 95% OF THE CARGO MOVING INTO AND LEAVING THIS COUNTRY EACH YEAR PASSES THROUGH AMERICAN PORTS.

OF COURSE, THIS CAUCUS WILL PROVE TO BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR US HERE IN THE HOUSTON AREA, SINCE WE ARE HOME TO ONE OF THE NATION'S LARGEST PORTS.

IN FACT, THE PORT OF HOUSTON RECEIVES MORE FOREIGN TONNAGE THAN ANY OTHER PORT IN AMERICA. EACH YEAR, HOUSTON ALONE RECEIVES 7.8 MILLION TONS OF CARGO FROM IRAQ ITSELF, 10 MILLION TONS OF CARGO FROM SAUDIA ARABIA AND NEARLY 5

MILLION TONS FROM ALGERIA, A KNOWN STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM.

BLUNTLY PUT, IF A PETROCHEMICAL PLANT WERE TO BE STRUCK BY A BOMB, WE COULD FACE A TRAGEDY GREATER IN MAGNITUDE THAN THE CHERNOBYL MELTDOWN, RIGHT IN THE HEART OF A MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREA.

THIS IS A PROBLEM WE CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE IN HOUSTON OR ANY OTHER AT RISK AMERICAN PORT.

AS I AM SURE YOU ALL AGREE, IT IS CRITICAL THAT WE SUPPORT OUR PORT AUTHORITIES AND THE THOUSANDS OF SHIPPING

COMPANIES AROUND THE WORLD WITH WHOM THEY WORK, BY ENABLING THEM TO DO THE BUSINESS OF AMERICA WITHOUT THE CONSTANT THREAT OF TERRORIST ATTACK. THE CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US MOVING FORWARD IS IN GETTING THE WASHINGTON POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THE RISKS, AND TO DEVELOP THE POLITICAL WILL TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.

SO FAR, THE MONEY THAT OUR PORTS SO DESPERATELY NEED HAS BEEN SLOW IN COMING.

THE U.S. COAST GUARD ANNOUNCED LAST YEAR THAT NECESSARY IMPROVEMENTS TO PORT SECURITY WILL COST OVER 1 BILLION DOLLARS IN FISCAL YEAR 2005 AND AS MUCH AS 6 BILLION OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS.

IN FACT, AMERICAN PORTS HAVE ALREADY APPLIED FOR NEARLY 1 BILLION DOLLARS IN FEDERAL FUNDING.

BUT SINCE THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11TH, CONGRESS HAS APPROPRIATED LESS THAN 400 MILLION DOLLARS FOR PORT SECURITY ACROSS AMERICA.

WELCOME FUNDING, YES- BUT FAR SHORT OF WHERE WE SHOULD BE GIVEN THE CHALLENGES WE FACE IN PROTECTING AMERICA'S BORDERS.

WE MUST MAKE A COMMITMENT TO ADEQUATELY FUND PORT SECURITY BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

BY GIVING LIP SERVICE TO THE PROBLEM, AND THEN NOT PROVIDING OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES WITH THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO PROTECT OUR FAMILIES, WE RISK UNDERMINING OUR OWN CAMPAIGN TO RID THE WORLD OF TERROR AND KEEP THE HOMELAND SECURE.

ACCORDING TO THE CIA, WE'RE MORE LIKELY TO BE ATTACKED BY A WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION SMUGGLED ABOARD A SHIP THAN WE ARE BY AN INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILE.

THIS YEAR THE ADMINISTRATION'S REQUEST FOR MISSILE DEFENSE PROGRAMS WAS \$9.7 BILLION; THE REQUEST FOR PORT SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS WAS—*GRAB YOUR HAT*—0...0 DOLLARS.

MEDIA REPORTS INDICATE THAT U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES BELIEVE AL QAEDA IS CONNECTED TO 15 CARGO SHIPS. WE KNOW

THAT AL QAEDA HAD AN ACTIVE PROGRAM TO ACQUIRE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. AND WE KNOW THAT THEY HAVE THE DESIRE TO ATTACK OUR COUNTRY.

WHAT WE ALSO KNOW, IS THAT OUR COUNTRY IS ENTIRELY UNPREPARED TO MEET THAT THREAT. AND IF WE HERE IN THIS ROOM KNOW THAT, HOW LONG IS IT GOING TO TAKE AL QAEDA TO FIGURE IT OUT?

SO HOW WOULD WE RESPOND IF OUR PORTS WERE ATTACKED TOMORROW?

THAT'S OF COURSE A VERY SERIOUS QUESTION TO ASK. BUT THE ANSWERS ARE SOMETHING

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WANTS SO BADLY, HE HAS THE DOD CONDUCTING WAR-GAMES ON IT NOW. I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN ONE OF THESE EXERCISES, ALONG WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COAST GUARD, CUSTOMS, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AND MANY OTHERS. THE RESULTS OF OUR EXERCISE WERE ALARMING.

SIMULATED TERRORIST INCIDENTS AT U.S. PORTS RESULTED IN A PORT LOCK DOWN. NO SHIPS WERE ALLOWED TO ENTER OR EXIT THE COUNTRY AND THE COST TO OUR ECONOMY RAN INTO THE BILLIONS.

BUT WE DON'T NEED SIMULATIONS TO TELL US THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF A PORT CLOSURE. THE LONG BEACH SHUT DOWNS COST A BILLION DOLLARS A DAY. AND THAT'S JUST ONE PORT.

I THINK ALL OF US IN THIS ROOM TODAY KNOW WHAT THE ECONOMIC STAKES ARE. AND WHEN YOU ADD TO THAT THE POTENTIALLY ENORMOUS LOSS OF LIFE THAT COULD RESULT FROM A TERRORIST ATTACK, IT ALL ADDS UP TO ONE CONCLUSION:

WE NEED TO TAKE ACTION NOW. NOT TOMORROW. NOT NEXT YEAR.

THE ADMINISTRATION NEEDS TO GREEN LIGHT SIGNIFICANT FUNDING FOR PORT SECURITY AND MY COLLEAGUES IN THE CONGRESS NEED TO PASS IT INTO LAW.

FINDING A LONG TERM SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM WILL TAKE THE BEST THINKERS, MOST INNOVATIVE PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS AND WILLING LEGISLATORS.

THE CONGRESSIONAL PORT SECURITY CAUCUS HAS PUT TOGETHER JUST THAT KING OF GROUP.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH MANY OF YOU, MY COLLEAGUES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE

AND IN BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS, AS WELL AS DR. STEPHEN FLYNN OF THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS...

THE PORT SECURITY CAUCUS WILL BE WORKING TO DETERMINE THE TRUE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM OUR PORTS FACE, AND WHICH MEANS WOULD BE BEST EMPLOYED TO ADDRESS IT.

THE CAUCUS IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON PUBLISHING A REPORT BASED ON INPUT GARNERED FROM EXPERTS, STAKEHOLDERS AND THE MEMBERSHIP. THE REPORT TO THE CAUCUS WILL HIGHLIGHT OUR GROUPS'

FINDINGS AND LAY OUT RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR ACTION.

IN CONCLUSION LET ME SAY THIS.

WE FACE VERY SERIOUS CHALLENGES IN
ADDRESSING THE SECURITY VULNERABILITES
IN OUR SHIPPING AND PORT INDUSTRIES.

FOR THE MOST PART THE ANSWERS ARE
COMPLICATED AND EXPENSIVE.

I CAN TELL YOU THAT THOSE ARE TWO WORDS
MOST POLTICIANS IN WASHINGTON DON'T LIKE
TO HEAR.

BUT IN THIS SITUATION MORE THAN PERHAPS
ANY OTHER, WE SIMPLY DON'T HAVE A CHOICE.

THE STAKES ARE TOO HIGH.

THE RISKS TOO GREAT.

THE POTENTIAL FOR TRAGEDY TO
OVERWHELMING FOR US NOT TO TAKE
DECISIVE ACTION

AFTER ALL, HOW COULD WE EXPLAIN AFTER
THE NEXT TERRORIST ATTACK ON AMERICAN
SOIL, THAT OUR COUNTRY WAS WILLING TO
SPEND 80 BILLION DOLLARS TO LIBERATE THE
OPPRESSED PEOPLE OF IRAQ

...BUT WERE UNABLE TO COMMIT THE MONEY NECESSARY TO PROTECT OUR HOMELAND AGAINST WHAT THE C.I.A. HAS DETERMINED IS ONE OF THE GREATEST VULNERABILITIES IN AMERICA TODAY, THE THREAT OF ATTACK AGAINST OUR OWN PORTS?

THE ANSWER IS WE SIMPLY COULD NOT

ALL OF MY COLLEAGUES IN THE PORT SECURITY CAUCUS UNDERSTAND THIS.

THEY AGREE THAT THE THREAT TO OUR NATION'S PORTS AND OUR COMMUNITIES IS A

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED.

AND I CAN TELL YOU THAT THE PORT SECURITY CAUCUS WILL BE WORKING HARD TO ENSURE THAT ADDITIONAL FUNDING IS APPROPRIATED, THAT THE NECESSARY STEPS ARE TAKEN, AND THAT AMERICAN PORTS REMAIN SECURE.

AND I WOULD LIKE TO ADD JUST ONE MORE THOUGHT ON THAT NOTE.

THAT I FEEL A CRITICAL PART OF THE LONG TERM SOLUTION FOR THE HOUSTON AREA IS THE 147TH AIR WING AT ELLINGTON. AS I

BELIEVE YOU ALL ALREADY KNOW, THE BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE PROCESS HAS PUT THE TEXAS AIR NATIONAL GUARD'S 147TH FIGHTER WING AT ELLINGTON FIELD IN JEAPORDY.

I KNOW YOU WILL HEAR MUCH MORE ABOUT THIS FROM GENE TULICH (TOO-LICK) FOLLOWING MY REMARKS. BUT, I WANT YOU TO KNOW I AM FULLY SUPPORTING THE WORK THAT'S BEING DONE TO KEEP THE 147TH AT ELLINGTON.

THE FIGHTER WING PROTECTS NOT ONLY THE CITY OF HOUSTON BUT VITAL ENTITIES THROUGHOUT THE AREA SUCH AS THE PORT,

PETROCHEMICAL COMPANIES, THE TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER, NASA'S JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, THE SOUTH TEXAS NUCLEAR POWER PLANT, OFFSHORE OIL RIGS AND THE PLANNED BIO-DEFENSE LAB IN GALVESTON. IT WOULD BE A HUGE BLOW TO HOUSTON'S HOMELAND AND PORT SECURITY TO LOSE THE 147TH. I ASSURE YOU I WILL DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO MAKE SURE WE KEEP THIS VITAL SOURCE OF STRENGTH FOR HOUSTON AT ELLINGTON FIELD.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.