

the same way, I believe the lack of a fundamental accounting for the greatest tragedy in the Nation's history—one that touched all Americans and permanently altered the way we live and think about ourselves—is another source of alienation and insecurity.

I do not believe the administration and the Congress have given the American people reason to be confident that we no longer remain vulnerable to terrorist attack, despite the admirable leadership our President has shown in prosecuting the war on terror, and despite the important work of Congress to create a Department of Homeland Security. The congressional intelligence committees have been conducting a very limited investigation into the intelligence failures related to September 11 and even this narrow inquiry has been sidelined by staff disputes that disrupted its operations and an FBI investigation into leaked material. Strangely, the FBI is now investigating the same people who are investigating the FBI. Indeed, until this week the joint committee has not held any open hearings. Ranking Republican Senator SHELBY in particular has been outspoken in criticizing its lack of progress before it goes out of existence when the 107th Congress adjourns.

Both Senator SHELBY and joint committee co-chairman Senator BOB GRAHAM support the establishment of an independent commission to carry on the work performed by the congressional intelligence investigation they helped to lead. I am pleased that a number of the Senate members of the joint congressional intelligence committee have endorsed our proposal to establish a panel that would build upon their work. The rationale for an independent commission seems indisputable if the very leaders charged with a more narrow inquiry do not believe their own investigation met the necessary standards to authoritatively report on and learn from our past failures.

Many in Congress and the administration voiced concern last year that an independent investigation into September 11th's causes and consequences would interfere with Congress' investigation into these matters. With Congress planning to adjourn very soon, the congressional investigation represents only a first step into the intelligence and other failures that gave the terrorists their opening. The independent commission Senator LIEBERMAN and I are proposing would explicitly build on the work of the congressional investigation and would go far beyond it by examining Government practice and policy in a host of other areas, including foreign policy, border control, aviation security, and law enforcement.

Americans deserve answers after the events of September. This issue rises above politics, as the families and friends who lost loved ones will attest. Indeed, a commission would remove the issue from the political realm and

serve the needs of both the administration and Congress by providing a blueprint for action, above and beyond any conclusions the joint congressional intelligence investigation may draw from its limited review.

Leaders of the joint congressional investigation into the intelligence failures of September 11th have said the attacks may well have been preventable, based on everything we have learned since then about what we knew and how it fit together in a way that formed a blueprint for attack. I find it unfathomable, and frankly unacceptable, that we would accept that we could have prevented the attacks, but in the same breath say we should move on. We should move on—after we have answered all the lingering questions about why we were neither prepared nor organized to meet the challenge of terrorism, and after we have made the kind of reforms that only a panel of distinguished experts separated from politics could propose.

An independent inquiry will not impose a serious burden on the administration as it prosecutes our just war on terrorism, any more than a similar inquiry after Pearl Harbor impeded Franklin D. Roosevelt's prosecution of World War II. Nor should it prevent members of Congress, the press, or any American citizen from questioning or criticizing the Government's apparent failures over the course of successive administrations. All wars and national security failures have occasioned contemporaneous criticism, and the Republic has managed to thrive.

It is irresponsible in a time of war, or any time for that matter, to attack or defend unthinkingly or because partisan identification is one's supreme interest. But it is not responsible or right to shrink from offering thoughtful criticism when and to whom it is due, and when the consequences of incompletely understanding failures of governance are potentially catastrophic. On the contrary, such timidity is indefensibly irresponsible especially in times of war, so irresponsible that it verges on the unpatriotic.

Two years before the attacks, the distinguished Hart-Rudman Commission on national security warned that as a result of the threat of catastrophic terrorism, "Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers." Congress and successive administration ignored the commission's recommendations for reform to defend against this threat—many of which are now embodied in the homeland security legislation we are considering this week. We shouldn't wait for the next attack to investigate what more we need to do to protect the American people.

Until we have comprehensive assessment of needed reforms across the spectrum of our Government, based on what went wrong last September, we will not be prepared to predict and prevent the next attack. Americans need answers. I urge my colleagues to join

us to create a commission that will tell them the truth—and put in place the protections that will prevent future generations from judging us for abdicating our responsibility to that truth.

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. President, I have been asked by Senator HATCH to request unanimous consent that Senator SCHUMER be removed as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4693.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 5:56 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 7:13 p.m., when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. MURRAY).

DOMESTIC NEEDS

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I want to thank publicly the majority leader, TOM DASCHLE. Yesterday, Leader DASCHLE took to the floor and talked about something that, frankly, is just not talked about by this administration, and that is the very sad state of our economy. Somebody needs to focus on that because, while we must devote much of our time to the war against terrorism, while we must devote much of our time to figuring out the best way to meet the threat that Iraq poses in terms of her weapons of mass destruction and the frightening prospect of those weapons being used, while we address those issues, I think we know very well that an administration must also pay attention to domestic needs, to the job needs, the educational needs, the health care needs. We must do both things in a great nation like this.

So as the Democratic leader made his statement yesterday, it is stunning to see that, in some categories, this economy under this administration is the worst we have seen in more than 90 years. It is very serious. We must address it. We must have a plan to address it. We must look back at the success of the Clinton administration and other administrations, Democratic and Republican, which had good economic records. We are seeing record stock market losses because there is a loss of confidence. There is a decrease in earnings and there are massive layoffs. We have seen a maiming or loss in private sector jobs—the worst in 50 years—and the weakest economic growth in 50 years.

Madam President, I hope this Senate will take care of the two most important things we could do: Foreign policy concerns and also domestic concerns, with a prime focus on this economy and turning it around and giving Americans the kind of confidence they had in the 1990s. That was a good time for America.