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On the Anniversary of 9/11, Where Is Homeland Security as an Election Issue?

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This November's presidential election has already turned into a heated confrontation involving issues that are important to the American public. Yet one critical concern—homeland security—continues to receive scant attention from either major party candidate. The anniversary of the 9/11 attacks should remind both campaigns that the issue of homeland security cannot be ignored.

A Missing Piece of the Puzzle. Both Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Barack Obama (D-IL) have largely ignored the domestic aspect of homeland security. To be certain, each candidate has presented counterterrorism speeches detailing a laundry list of initiatives designed to combat the roots of terrorism worldwide. These speeches, however, were largely focused on U.S. international posture, military maneuvering, and the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. While Obama's plan focuses on improving America's image abroad, McCain seeks to harness human intelligence to counter global terrorism.

While the counterterrorism challenges addressed thus far by McCain and Obama are certainly an integral part of our national security, they constitute but a single piece of the much larger homeland security puzzle. The U.S. continues to fight the war on terrorism at home, countering both homegrown threats and those who have infiltrated our country seeking to do us harm. Additionally, America is also contending with natural disasters, infrastructure adequacy problems, and immigration and border security problems, among a long list of domestic

security challenges. Neither candidate's forte is the domestic side of homeland security—which means both candidates will have to do their homework and ensure that the advisors they listen to are well-versed in this arena.

Politics Is Not Homeland Security Strategy. Securing the homeland is not a partisan issue. Good policies often rest on common sense and the desire to achieve America's security while protecting our freedom, prosperity, and constitutional tenets. And often the best solution is not more policy but allowing instead for state and local governments, as well as the private sector, to fulfill vital tasks in an efficient manner. Both campaigns should focus on developing a homeland security platform that calls for the following:

- **Resiliency.** Resiliency is the capacity to maintain continuity of activities even in the face of threats. This approach recognizes that we cannot prevent all threats. It is a dual approach of protecting against attack while ensuring that even if we are attacked, society will continue on. Policy mandates based on politics or fears instead of risk have no place in a resilient society. Though tempting, both campaigns must eschew these

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types of mandates for those that will ensure real security. Resiliency must be an integral component of the next Administration's policies.

- *Decreased Over-Federalization.* As a result of the flawed notion that the federal government must be the entity tasked with protecting the homeland, homeland security continues to be plagued by over-federalization. For example, federal disaster declarations are at an all-time high. Besides the inefficiencies of federal government intervention, over-federalization eliminates the ability of the states to choose the right course of action for its citizens. This degradation of state power exceeds the enumerated powers of Congress, trashing the concept of limited government.
- *Congressional Oversight Reform.* The President can and should put pressure on Congress to reform its current oversight of homeland security. Currently, too many committees have jurisdiction over the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and oversight is mired in politics. Consolidating jurisdiction over DHS will allow the homeland committees to develop vital relationships between Congress and DHS, lessening the current inefficiencies, bureaucratic infighting and political protectionism.

- *A Professional Development Program.* We should institute national programs aimed at developing a cadre of leaders who understand the security and public safety needs of the 21st century. In addition to producing able leadership for the post-9/11 era, such a program would also be more efficient than reorganizing the government department by department. Such reorganization could be achieved without throwing more regulations on the private sector; continuing the path toward over-federalization or throwing more money at the states.

Meeting the Challenge. Both presidential campaigns must aggressively examine this issue and begin to communicate administration priorities to the public, regardless of whether the issue is politically profitable. Homeland security is more than a campaign stop, a photo-op, or a press release. As both candidates prepare to remember 9/11, this anniversary will hopefully serve as a challenge to examine this issue closely. The victims of 9/11 deserve as much.

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