

Statement of

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss

United States Senator
Georgia
September 23, 2003

Statement for Chairman Saxby Chambliss
Immigration and Border Security Subcommittee Hearing
Information-Sharing and Watchlisting: Changes Needed to Protect Our Borders
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Last July, this Subcommittee held a hearing titled, Visa Issuance, Information-Sharing and Enforcement, that focused on an absence of information flow among federal agencies concerning visa revocations. In the post-9-11 world, we need to scrutinize every step of the process for those coming to the United States: from background checks to visa issuance, border protection to immigration enforcement. Today, we will look at the initial, often unseen, step of watchlisting in order to ensure that the right information gets into the hands of those who keep potential terrorists and other criminals out of our country.

One problem we saw after September 11th was the lack of information-sharing. A frustrating example of this failure to communicate was the State Department issuing visas to two of the dead hijackers six months after the attack. To address this, we've got to provide our folks on the front lines with more and better information, to connect the dots by sharing intelligence among various agencies, and to get the information out from overseas to the federal level and down to the state and local level.

We've made progress as a nation in making America a safer place, although we still have a ways-to-go. We created the Department of Homeland Security, separated and clarified the missions of immigration services and border protection, and unified federal agency efforts to protect Americans in a comprehensive and coordinated approach. An example of improvements is in the intelligence community with new strategies to gather and share critical information in an effective manner.

Last week, the Administration announced the creation of a consolidated watchlist. Situated at the FBI, a new Terrorist Screening Center will merge the dozen different watchlists from nine federal agencies into a single source that is accessible to consular officers, border protection officials, and law enforcement. Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge announced this Center will "get information to our agents on the borders and all those who can put it to use on the front lines, and get it there fast." I have long supported a common watchlist, but the key is to have a database that is accessible, up-to-date, and substantial.

Along with a consolidated list, the State Department's TIPOFF database will be transferred to the multi-agency intelligence body, the Terrorist Threat Integration Center, or "T-TIC," which was created earlier this year. TIPOFF, which contains classified intelligence gathered largely from foreign sources, will become a main component of the consolidated watchlist. But questions need to be answered: Why is the master watchlist at FBI rather than Homeland Security? Why is TIPOFF being moved to T-TIC rather than to where the master watchlist will reside? How effective will the new Department of Homeland Security be if T-TIC and the FBI control watchlists that are essential to visa issuance and border protection?

Information-sharing and coordination among immigration-related agencies is essential to our homeland security, and we must get it right. We recognize the importance of watchlists in the effort to keep out of the country certain persons who threaten the United States. We are pleased to have testifying before us those who are integral in the new strategy for information-sharing and watchlisting:

? John Brennan, Director of the Terrorist Threat Integration Center

? Larry Mefford, Executive Assistant Director for Counter-terrorism and Counter-intelligence at the FBI; and

? Bill Parrish, Assistant Secretary for Information Analysis at the Department of Homeland Security.