



U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Oversight, Agency, Action, Federal Rights & Federal Courts

Hearing on “Willful Blindness – The Consequences of Agency Efforts to De-Emphasize
Radical Islam in Combating Terrorism”

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On the morning of September 11, 2001, while working for then-US Senator Russ Feingold, my colleagues and I got word that a plane hijacked by terrorists was headed for the Capitol.

I still vividly recall what it was like to run out of the Hart Senate office building – fearing for the safety of my friends, colleagues and family members.

Three weeks later, our Senate office received mail contaminated with deadly anthrax spores.

My colleagues and I were put on powerful antibiotics for several months to counteract possible anthrax exposure.

You see, I understand, at a deeply personal level, what it means to be under attack and to fear harm.

I resolved then to do my part to ensure that violent extremists – regardless of race, religion or ideology – never succeed in their mission to destroy the values that make our nation great: a commitment to freedom, justice and equality for all.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Coons, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on how we can do better to keep our nation safe while upholding our nation’s founding values.

Days after 9/11, President George W. Bush called on the nation to “uphold the values of America.”

He said, “No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith.”

At a dark moment in our nation's history, President Bush comforted the American people by assuring them that we are stronger together.

Nearly 15 years after 9/11, we are experiencing another dark moment.

Candidates for President of the United States have said:

- That law enforcement agencies should “patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods.”
- That there should be a national registry for Muslims;
- That American Muslims should carry special ID cards; and
- That all Muslims should be banned from entering the U.S.

This rhetoric makes our nation less safe.

Law enforcement should focus on credible intelligence and evidence of criminal behavior – not adding more stacks of hay to what the FBI director has already called “a search for needles in a nationwide haystack.”

We are also less safe because ISIS wants this to be a war against Muslims.

Think about it: Do we really want to surrender our values, American values, to a death cult that has no respect whatsoever for human life and human dignity?

Tragically, this dangerous political rhetoric has signaled to the public that it is okay to fear your Muslim neighbor. It has led to a disturbing and unprecedented rise in hate crimes – murders, fire-bombings and shootings.

In the last seven months alone, there have been nearly 100 hate crimes against American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

These hate incidents are not mere statistics. They affect real people and families – most importantly our children.

Late last year, a mother told the story of her daughter, Sofia. Sofia began collecting all her favorite things in a bag fearing that the Army would come to take her family away because they are Muslim.

As sad as this story is, the response from U.S. Army veterans who heard this story was powerful and touching. Veterans posted images of themselves in uniform with this message to Sofia: I will protect you.

Since the tragic events in Orlando, Muslim Advocates, along with Americans from all walks of life, have stood with our friends in the LGBTQ community.

You see, we are not willing to give up on America – the idea that a group of diverse people in every imaginable way can form a lasting bond based on the shared principles of freedom, justice and equality for all.

Some would dismiss this as political correctness. To me, it is a belief in the power of what has made America great.

We hope that our elected officials are not willing to give up on America – that *you* will do everything in *your* power to uphold and defend America's defining values and principles.

Thank you.

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