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Homeland security: We owe it the future

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By **JON S. CORZINE**
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD NEWS

Two years have passed since the horrific attack on our nation on Sept. 11, 2001. It was a day that changed our lives and changed the course of America's history.

We lost husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, children, friends and neighbors. It touched all our lives; it crumbled the dreams of thousands. In our New Jersey community, we lost 693 souls.

Our unity, resolve and faith were tested, and I believe we emerged stronger as individuals committed to the principles of our nation. The ability of our government to protect us has also been tested. We in government remain responsible for securing all our futures and making certain we have done everything possible to prevent another attack.

The impact of Sept. 11 was very real and close to home for all of us. Many of us have been on an emotional roller coaster since. There were people who rode the train to New York City with me each morning when I worked on Wall Street whose lives were snuffed in the attack on the World Trade Center. There were kids I watched grow up and coached in Summit who died on that horrible day. Some of us continue to hurt physically; others hurt spiritually. There remains a sense of loss, a sense of pain, and a sense of worry and uncertainty.

It is clear that there were wide and unfortunate gaps in communication within and between our intelligence agencies that serve to protect America's citizens before Sept. 11, 2001. The president and the Congress moved to create a new Department of Homeland Security to address our vulnerabilities and better coordinate an awesome task that requires the utmost cooperation between federal, state and local

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authorities.

We try to look out over the horizon and probe potential vulnerabilities. How can our military, our police, our firefighters, our emergency personnel, our doctors and hospital workers be best armed and best prepared to respond to terrorism? How can we be sure that we are doing everything possible to protect our nation and our security? That is our charge as public officials, and that is why I believe it is irresponsible that the Bush administration - two years after the fact - has failed to embrace security standards for chemical plants and other manufacturing and storage facilities where potentially dangerous and lethal chemicals are used and stored.

In spite of repeated statements about the need to address the issue of chemical facilities' security from Tom Ridge, the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, from the Department of Justice, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the administration has not matched its rhetoric with reality. When the terrorism alert color-code changes from yellow to orange, the homeland security department has chemical facilities at the top of its list. Yet there have been no real steps taken by the government to face up to the potential for a terrorist attack against any of the thousands of chemical facilities in our nation and state.

In New Jersey alone, there are seven facilities where a single attack could affect more than one million people. We know this because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has collected risk management data on the potential impact of an industrial accident from plants across the country.

The danger is real. The people who work in and live around these plants deserve security standards to protect against the potential for a terrorist attack.

We also need to look beyond the bricks and mortar - beyond the barbed wire-topped fences and the closed circuit monitors. We need to encourage industry to move toward inherently safer technologies in manufacturing and production. An inherently safer plant is far less likely to be a potential terrorist target.

I first introduced the Chemical Facilities Security Act in October 2001 to marshal the government's security and environmental experts to assess the vulnerability of chemical facilities, and create a high-priority list of facilities where an attack would impact the most people.

Standards need to be uniform, and compliance needs to be across the board. I am grateful that some chemical companies have acknowledged the danger of attack and voluntarily moved to toughen up security. But that's not good enough, and in fact, these good citizens are being put at competitive disadvantages if others in their industry refuse to invest in security.

It's also not good enough that there has been limited effort to invest in safer technology, which is why my legislation would make available \$50 million in incentives to help make those investments.

I recently took a tour of some of New Jersey's most important chemical refineries, oil refineries and power plants to see what is being done to protect those critical facilities in our post Sept. 11 world.

Real steps have been taken to limit access to these plants, but they are still hard-by the New Jersey Turnpike or the Arthur Kill, and potential danger remains real.

That is why it is essential that the federal government take seriously its homeland security responsibility. In addition to setting chemical plant security standards, we have to be sure that our first responders - our local and county and state law enforcement officials - are well prepared to respond to attacks. We have to be sure that our U.S. Coast Guard has the equipment and manpower to protect our shores. We have to partner with industry when they ask for our assistance because they acknowledge a public responsibility in toughening security.

We cannot afford to wait for another attack, or another tragedy, to act. We cannot afford to act with hindsight; we must act with foresight. We have sensitive infrastructure that must be protected now. We don't want to ask after the fact why did this happen, when we have the ability right now to answer how can we make sure it doesn't happen.

The security of our nation is paramount, because if we are not secure, who will be vigilant in the defense of democracy and freedom.

We live in the most powerful nation on earth, but we are not granted guarantees. We cannot pretend that our power makes us invincible. We cannot pretend that we have no enemies. Ours is a special place. The American character of courage and compassion, bravery and unselfishness, determination and charity rose up against our enemy after Sept. 11, 2001. We must remain on guard, ever alert and vigilant. We owe it to those who died on Sept. 11. We owe it to our future.

Jon S. Corzine , Democrat, is the senior U.S. senator from New Jersey.

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