

Detroit, Michigan

Wednesday, June 27, 2002

1:21 p.m.

THE CHAIRMAN: Each speaker, I would ask that you identify yourselves for the record, and we may begin.

MR. COLLINS: My name is Jeffery Collins. I am the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. I thank this body for the invitation to come in to share some comments with regard to post-911 activities, particularly in our office, and if I may proceed, I will go right into it, if that's okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's fine.

MR. COLLINS: When I took office as U. S. Attorney, it was November 19th of last year. It was clear that the top priority of the Justice Department is to counter terrorism and to do everything we possibly can to prevent any future acts of terrorism. In addition to prevention, which is the top goal, the Justice Department is equally committed to protecting vulnerable communities from any acts of discriminatory backlash. I think our goals are two-fold, prevention, also protection of communities from hate crimes or any acts of backlash.

With regard to the first priority, with regard to prevention, when I came in the office I was confronted with a project that has impacted this community, and that was the interview project, which there were some 500 -- there was a directive from the Department of Justice, instructing our district to interview some 500 people who may provide law enforcement with helpful information to assist us in piecing together a puzzle to learn more about terrorism. These interviews have been described as a request for help. We have one of the largest number of interviews, 500, to be conducted in the country. When this initiative was first announced, I believe the climate in this district was tense, was on edge. I remember the headline in the newspaper that read "Arab American Men Face Grilling."

I'm very proud that law enforcement implementing this initiative did so with sensitivity, did so with compassion, and did so without compromising any legitimate law enforcement interests. It was the unanimous decision of our anti-terrorism task force, which is a group made up of federal, state and local law enforcement, to send letters to everyone who was on our list to be interviewed. We decided not to show up at people's homes unannounced, show up at people's places of employment unannounced, or to wait outside university classrooms and pounce on or ambush students with an interview. We decided to send the letters, and also I am proud that the Department of Justice approved this procedure.

I believe, you know, my superiors recognize that one size doesn't fit all and as one policy may be implemented in our district, it may not be the same as in another part of the country. But in the letter that we mailed out, it explained that this procedure was entirely voluntary, and voluntary means just that, voluntary. Those who did not want to be interviewed, there was no sanction for failing to be interviewed. We further explained in the letter that by being a recipient of the letter, you are not a suspect, but we merely thank you to provide helpful information to law enforcement. Finally, the letter indicated that the recipient could pick the location or the venue of where the interview was to take place. The agents who conducted the interviews were instructed to treat everybody with respect, with decency with courtesy, the same way you or I would want if we were being interviewed or if a friend or family member were being interviewed.

I am proud that I did not receive one complaint of anyone who was interviewed as to how they were treated. We only had, I believe, twelve declinations of people who declined to be interviewed. Many people, when the process was completed, agreed to help us in the future and provide us with information, if it becomes relevant, as it relates to terrorism. So I think a bridge of trust was made, you know, during this interview initiative and it worked out, I think, extremely well.

We also have recently received direction for a second round of interviews, not as many as before. I think there were ninety the second time and we are using the same procedure as before,

sending out the letters explaining the process and we are in the home stretch right now of completing round two of the interviews.

Other initiatives in this district, as it relates to post-911, is a group that formed called, IBET, Integrated Border Enforcement Team, where we have partners with the Windsor law enforcement community and the federal law enforcement community on our side, to have enhanced border security at the tunnel, at the bridge. This group has only been in existence a few months and has already led to some alien smuggling arrests.

We are also appointing an initiative called River Watch. The Coast Guard is the lead agency on this. Basically, what River Watch is all about is where pleasure boaters on our Great Lakes are asked to be the eyes and ears of law enforcement. If they observe any suspicious activity, there is a number to call.

With regard to River Watch, also in our office, we have formed the Counter-Terrorism Unit and the marching orders of this unit are prevention, prevention, prevention. I anticipate that this unit will be busy, in terms of investigations pertaining to conspiracy to commit terrorism, money laundering, financial transaction cases, identity theft cases. So I think it's important that law enforcement is able to choke off the funding that finances terrorism as well.

With regard to the second main point of the mission of the Justice Department, as relates to post-911 I mentioned, was to protect communities from discriminatory backlash. The position of the Department of Justice has been consistent from 911, that any acts of backlash or hate crimes are un-American. They run counter to the principals of freedom and equality that our country is founded upon. I think since 911, there has been some three hundred incidents of hate crimes, most of which were committed within the first few weeks after 911.

There was one very disturbing case in our district in Fenton, Michigan, right near Flint, where a gentleman of Middle Eastern descent received a very troubling phone call, where the person threatened bodily harm to the homeowner and his family. The homeowner did the right thing. He preserved the tape from the message machine, turned it over to the FBI. We did an investigation, traced the call, made an arrest.

Just recently, we have obtained a conviction where that offender received a stiff period of incarceration. In addition to aggressively prosecuting and investigating hate crime complaints, our office is also a part of many organizations whose mission is for fairness and equality. I am a member, through our office, of the Michigan Alliance Against Hate Crimes. In addition, I'm co-chair of an organization called ALPCT, the only group of its kind in the nation, to my knowledge, and that stands for Advocates and Leaders for Police and Community Trusts. It brings law enforcement and civil rights groups together monthly to discuss tough issues: issues of profiling, issues of police officer sensitivity. This group has made a lot of progress in bringing the different parties to the table and actually hitting these issues head on. As a matter of fact, before we broke for the summer, this group decided that it was the best practice for law enforcement to keep information, take information down pertaining to the race of drivers as well as passengers in automobiles.

I would also like to state maybe in closing that in terms of community outreach, that our office has been consistently accessible to the public with regard to issues pertaining to 911. I have been to numerous community forums and events like this. I remember the second day on the job, I was at a community event where the title was Combating Discriminatory Backlash, and that outreach has not stopped. I mean I looked at some of the presenters coming here later on this afternoon. We could have done this in my office, because every month I meet with, you know, community leaders from the Arab American community and I have invited the leaders into the office and we discuss these issues around the table. It is understood that I have an open door. I just don't lecture, I listen. Just last month, under the leadership of Imad Hamad, who is the next presenter, his group invited me to Dearborn for a lunch in which I think he was very appreciative of the efforts of our office for community outreach and I thank them for that lunch, as well.

I also would note that last November, my boss, John Ashcroft, while he was in this district for a very short period of time, he was really in town to meet with some Canadian officials, but he came in the night before and he also sat down in my office and met with many of the leaders in the Arab American community.

I just think that all of the community outreach, as a whole, through the organizations I have mentioned, through our monthly meetings, that this district is a model for law enforcement community relations. I am proud to serve in this position and have a chance to work with so many groups, as I have indicated.

In closing, at the Justice Department we are committed to winning the war on terrorism and we are equally committed to protecting communities from any type of discrimination. So I thank you for allowing me to appear before you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Collins. Are there any questions from the panel?

MS. HAMILTON-SMITH: I have one. In terms of community outreach, I guess I'm more concerned about any legislation or anything that could take us back to the McCarthy era, the spying on one's neighbors kind of thing. So I would like to know a little bit more about River Watch, what safeguards are there that that will not be misused?

MR. COLLINS: Again, I think any policy that is to be implemented effectively, is premised upon the integrity of the people who implement it. With regard to River Watch, that is on the community. If you are a pleasure boater, if you are out there and you observe something suspicious, there is a number to call. There is nothing clandestine about that. It's not, you know, spying on homeowners. It's like a neighborhood watch on the river.

MS. HAMILTON-SMITH: I understand that to be the intent. I guess my question would be if I was so motivated to be less than sensitive to my Arab and Chaldean neighbors, what prevents me, as a boater, from calling your office and saying, I think you need to check on this guy over here, when in fact he is not doing anything, he is a citizen just like me but happens to be of Arab descent, but I can run him through some hassle.

MR. COLLINS: I understand what you are asking. We cannot guard against someone misusing the program, in terms of making an unjustified complaint. In the position of law enforcement, if we receive a complaint, there will be some follow-up of it. But if it is determined to be frivolous, if it is determined to be totally unfounded and resources are expended toward that, then we would look into repercussions with regard to who filed it initially.

THE CHAIRMAN: What are the geographic boundaries of the Eastern District?

MR. COLLINS: It's a big district. I believe there are some thirty-four counties, as far south as Monroe, and we go all the way up to Cheboygan. A little more than two-thirds of the state's population reside the Eastern District of Michigan.

THE CHAIRMAN: How many attorneys?

MR. COLLINS: Right now, we have ninety-nine attorneys, one of the largest U. S. Attorney's Offices in the country, also a hundred support staff.

THE CHAIRMAN: How much has that grown since 911?

MR. COLLINS: Since 911 we were like at ninety. Through this new counter-terrorism unit, I could hire five, and we are also given funding for four spots for something else called Project Safe Neighborhoods, a firearms initiative. Our main office is right here in downtown Detroit. That's where about eighty-five of the lawyers are and we also have a branch office in Flint and Bay City as well, smaller offices there.

MR. HWONG: Roland Hwong. I am a member of the Attorney General's Hate Crimes Prevention Task Force, for the State Attorney General. I was just wondering if you might comment on any type of cooperation in terms of community outreach, because that's part of the Attorney General's Hate Crime Task Force mission, to do community outreach, in terms of identifying what constitutes hate crimes and the community aspect.

MR. COLLINS: I think community outreach is vital. I am prepared to partner with your office and we can do these efforts together. I think it is a very important that particularly in federal law enforcement, that you put aside ego, put aside turf issues and everyone has to be working on the same page with the same mission, which is to make this a safe district and to promote trust.

If there is anything I can do to further that, I want to be a part of that and so I commend what you are doing. If there is a way for us to partner, I would be more than happy to assist.

MS. HA AJLANI: Mr. Collins, my name is Ellen Ha. Based on your presentation, I get the sense that you are very much in touch the Arab American community and that your office is sensitive to the issues of the Arab Americans here locally in the Eastern District of Michigan.

In light of that, I'm wondering, do you feel that when the policies and guidelines are at issue from headquarters in D.C., and in light of the fact that Michigan, especially in the metropolitan Detroit area, has the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the country and it has the largest population of the Arabs anywhere around the world, outside of the Middle East, with that fact in mind, I'm wondering if the people at headquarters are sensitive to the issues that your office may be in tune and in touch with, through your involvement with the Arab American communities and that people in headquarters are sensitive to the issues?

MR. COLLINS: That's an excellent question. To answer it, yes, they are aware of the community outreach efforts, you know, that our office is doing. I didn't hear, but I was told that John Ashcroft was even one on of the national -- no. The show was on Sunday morning. I don't know if it was Meet The Press or one of those shows, where he complimented our district for its community outreach efforts. I have read literature, you know, where headquarters has complimented our district. So they are aware. They also understand, as I said earlier, that one size doesn't fit all and that the local U. S. Attorney, we are the ones who are here, we have an ear, you know, on the pulse of the community and they give deference to that.

They could have vetoed the idea about sending the letters but they did not, because they understood that we have a better sensitivity to the community because we are here, we live here. I grew up here, you know, so there have been relationships that have been built and I think that is respected and I have not received any roadblocks from D. C. in terms of implementing the policy.

THE CHAIRMAN: Have any other districts replicated the Eastern District's model?

MR. COLLINS: There is one that I'm aware of, after we sent the letters and it was going really well. That's Chicago, also. I think the Northern District of Illinois also asked for the copy of the letter and I don't know if they actually did it or not, but I believe they actually went ahead with the letter writing, as well.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

(No questions were posed by members of the panel.)

THE CHAIRMAN: How were the 500 that were being interviewed selected?

MR. COLLINS: That's another good question. The factors that I was given with regard to how someone came up on the list was if you were from a country -- if you had a passport from a country that there is an active terrorist presence and you had entered the country within, I think, for the first round of interviews, within the last six or seven years, and they were men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-three.

For the second round of interviews, it was whether or not you had entered the country since January of 2000 and the other criteria were the same. Men, and I believe the age range may have been like even a little higher up to the mid-forties, and if you had a passport from a country where there was active terrorism present.

THE CHAIRMAN: How many of the population?

MR. COLLINS: I think, 590, in total. The second round, yes, 590, if you add them together.

THE CHAIRMAN: How many of them were interviewed and how many were not located?

MR. COLLINS: With regard to the first round, I would say there were maybe eighty or so who were not located at all. When we sent out the letters, some did not respond to the letter at all. Those who did not respond to the letter at all, we then made home visits and if we were told, you know, at the home visit, we don't want to be interviewed, then all bets were off. After the letters being sent, after home visits, there may have been a group of about eighty or so who were just bad addresses and not locateable.

THE CHAIRMAN: How many were detained or remained in detention, if you can answer that.

MR. COLLINS: I can answer that and the answer to that is zero. Nobody was detained. There were no immigration violations brought against anyone who was interviewed.

MS. HA AJLANI: How many backlash cases does your office currently have, in terms of backlashes, as a result of the post-911 incident?

MR. COLLINS: Just that one.

MS. HA AJLANI: Just that one?

MR. COLLINS: That's right.

MS. HA AJLANI: Do you believe that that represents -- based on your rapport with the Arab American community here in town, do you get the sense that there may be others out there but people are afraid to go to the law enforcement office to make a complaint about backlash for whatever reasons, be it culturally or --

MR. COLLINS: I would hope that through the outreach, you know, that there is more of a comfort level in reporting incidents. If one is reported, we are going to look at it very thoroughly. I have not sensed the community holding back.

MR. HWONG: Is it because of civil rights jurisdiction, that other cases arise but they are prosecuted under state and local jurisdiction?

MR. COLLINS: On a federal statute, that's right. On a federal statute, for certain times -- I was reading today where there was a murder conviction in Wayne County of an individual who shot someone who -- I don't know all the circumstances but the shooter made some reference to 911 or was upset with the victim because of his heritage or ethnic background. Now, that case, that's a murder case, which in state court carries life imprisonment. So that wouldn't fall under, you know, our jurisdiction.

MS. THOMAS: Maybe I heard this before, but you said some of the people that the letters went to did not respond. You do not know where these people are today?

MR. COLLINS: There were a few, yes.

MS. THOMAS: How are we going to find them?

MR. COLLINS: Law enforcement has followed up on as many leads as we can, in terms of locating those who did not respond. Some had moved to other districts, out of Michigan. Some had moved out of the country. A great number had moved out of the country. Those that moved to other districts, we were in contact with, you know U. S. Attorney colleagues in the districts in which they have moved to, and they are conducting the interview. But there were a few who there was just no contact with at all.

You have to remember one thing, though. The people who were being interviewed were not suspects. They are not accused of doing anything wrong. To me, I have often compared it to

a canvas, where -- when I was a former defense attorney, I mean if a shooting happened on my block, I mean the police would be derelict if didn't go and interview everybody on the block, the neighbors, to see if you heard or saw anything. That is what this was, a canvas. It is not that a neighbor is accused of doing something wrong, you know, but we think they might have helpful information.

MS. HA AJLANI: I do understand the analogy that is being made but I guess if you have a homicide at a certain location and all the witnesses are people who live in the area are canvassed and interviewed because they may have seen or heard something, that may be some sort of evidence against the individual who may be accused or may be in evidence for or against that individual. In terms of -- I'm not criticizing the fact that you did interview the 500 people or that your office did interview them, but it seems to me that if you were in any way related to a country that was involved, that your country has labeled as a terrorism country and if you came from that country and even though I myself may be as good as an angel, that by the fact that I am being interviewed and that I was selected to be interviewed, that, even though I may have a clear understanding from your office and you and I have a clear understanding but you do not presume -- that you don't presume myself to be guilty of any acts of violence or terror and that you are going into the interview with no presumption but just doing a job, that you just want to ask some questions, a laundry list of questions, but my neighbors, who find out that I am being selected to be interviewed by your office may not have the benefit of your office knocking on the door. I'm certainly not suggesting that your office goes to everyone's neighbors and this person's colleagues and friends and let them know that we're not interviewing this individual because we believe he or she is a suspect -- but it seems to me that if I am from that sort of a country and if I happen to have been born or if I happen to have come there six years ago and that there is a presumption of me being related to some terrorism activity or people who don't really fully understand what is going on, and so therefore, while I am not a victim of backlash, I'm not a victim of any type of violence because of my ethnic background, yet I am put in a position where I may very well be.

I am just a little concerned because, you know, this time it may be the 500 individuals, next time it may be the ninety additional people or the second round it may be an additional people because of different criteria, because of some investigation that is being conducted by headquarters. But people who are not sensitive to the issues may take me as someone who may be related to some terrorist country, and that concerns me because I am presumed to be guilty by people who live around me.

MR. COLLINS: What is your name, again?

MS. HA AJLANI: Ellen Ha.

MR. COLLINS: I wish you could have been a fly on the wall during our anti-terrorism task force meeting, where we discussed how to implement this, because that concern was raised by law enforcement, how would the person's neighbor view this person, because when FBI rolls up, believe me, the whole block knows. They did my background check to get this job. They pulled up -- they are right there. I mean they stand out, you know. That's why we said in the letter, you pick the location. The only person that knows you got the letter is maybe the mailman and you. You can call us back. If you want to be interviewed at a library, if you want this interview to take place at a community center, you pick the location. We don't have to come to your home and put everybody on notice that you are being interviewed. We had sensitivity to that concern and that is why, you know, we let the person pick the location.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm running overtime.

MR. SALEH: Noel Saleh. Just to follow up, you have a number of these programs going. Are there any -- I'm sorry. You discussed initiatives that came from Mr. Ashcroft's office now, in terms of the call-in letters and so forth.

Two questions: One, are you aware of any new initiatives that are going to be generated from the Justice Department Headquarters and, two, are there any local initiatives that your office has implemented that we should be or could be informed of?

MR. COLLINS: I have informed, thus far, whom I am able to inform. That's all I have to say.

MR. SALEH: Okay.

MR. KOBRAK: Peter Kobrak. You talked a lot about the community. What issues are they raising in the Arab American community that you can't be responsible for and still do your job effectively?

MR. COLLINS: What are they asking me, that I can't respond to?

MR. KOBRAK: That you can't respond to the civil liberties issues they're raising and still do the job effectively, defending national security?

MR. COLLINS: It is a balance between national security and civil liberties. You know, there have been a lot of community concerns. I have gotten a lot of correspondence pertaining to one case in particular, the Haddad case, where this individual has deportation hearings scheduled, which the Justice Department has made the decision that that proceeding should be not open to the public. That ruling, as to whether or not it should be open to the public, there has been a Federal District Court judge here who said it should be open to the public.

His deportation hearing that is now on appeal to the Sixth Circuit and they have an oral argument, I think, in August, August 6th, as to whether or not it should be opened or not to the public. But I get constant communication, "Free Haddad, free Haddad," wanting these proceedings to be open. I feel that coming from the community. But, you know, nonetheless, the Justice Department has made the decision that in terms of national security, a special interest case, that this proceeding should not be open to the public but that is being litigated.

MR. HWONG: I am just wondering if there is any systematic way by which the ninety-four U. S. attorneys can provide feedback to Washington with respect to civil liberties concerns? Is there anything that you know? Is it a two-way street?

MR. COLLINS: Yes, it is a two-way street. When I came on board, we had this orientation a week or two, once I got on board, and we were told that there are different committees that you can get on. There's like twenty different committees. The one I decided to get on was terrorism. I'm on the Terrorism Subcommittee of U.S. Attorneys. There's about twelve of us on these boards and we meet and discuss these issues and report right back to Larry Thompson, the Deputy Attorney General, and John Ashcroft. So that is the vehicle for the two-way

communication. There is a subcommittee that deals with civil liberties concerns.

MR. HOLLIDAY: I am Prince Holliday. Having been a judge and rose to the level of Appeals Court, what is the difference between what you were doing then as to what you are doing now, if you had it to do again?

MR. COLLINS: My hair is gray a little now.

MR. HOLLIDAY: And if you had it to do again, which would you pick?

MR. COLLINS: Without question, I would pick what I'm doing now. I love this. I mean being able to work on issues like 911, I mean to me this trumps everything I have done before and I felt honored and blessed to be a trial court judge and a judge in the Court of Appeals, a great job, but the magnitude, the reach of this touches everybody and like I said, I feel very humble to be in the position.

The main difference, you know, between the two is that as a judge you are reactive.

When someone brings a case to you, you decide it, next case, you are reactive. Whereas, in this job you are proactive. You know, you can institute policies, you can try to get to some of the root causes of crime, which really attracted me to this job. So I'm as happy as a kid in a candy store.

THE CHAIRMAN: On that note, Mr. Collins, thank you. Keep up the good work and congratulations. We appreciate it.

MR. COLLINS: Thank you.

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THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hamad, please state your full name for the record.

MR. HAMAD: Imad Hamad. I am the ADC Regional Director of Michigan. First, I thank you for this opportunity. I think it's very crucial to have this advisory committee address and readdress the many ongoing challenges pertaining to the cause of civil rights and our civil liberties as Americans. Maybe it's the time to focus on us as Arab Americans but I have no doubt that the effects of the many policies and directives and legislations that have been passed has affected every American as a result, regardless of their race, national origin or color.

Unfortunately, there is some kind of impression that somehow justifies or explains the

public reaction to stripping our civil liberties, not as it should be, simply because many people tend to wrongly believe that it is not directed toward us, it's against them, simply because of the horrible and horrific attacks that took place on September 11th, which put us all as a nation, as a society, as a world and as a small community, under the scope and drastically changed our lives and affected all aspects of our lives.

I just want to make sure that I attend to the issue that Mr. Collins raised. I feel it is important before I address the many challenges or cite the many challenges, which you see a good description or explanation about it in the handout I just gave you. It is true that there has been a good level of cooperation between the Arab American community and our government, locally and nationally. I would say that this spirit of cooperation is helped tremendously by having us be able to cope with the many challenges and the negative backlash that we witnessed as a community.

I would like to cite that this commitment really helped, coming from the U. S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, the AOC and maybe -- you may know that even according to the U. S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, there were like 350 complaints that they pursued, a third of them already in action.

I would make a reference that here in Michigan, I would say we were pleased at having a man of integrity such as the U. S. Attorney Jeffery Collins. I think his leadership brought lots of comfort. However, that did not put an end, nor did not take away the policies of the U. S. Department of Justice from the Attorney General's Office which is, by all means, selective, which has, by all means, targeted Arab American communities and by all means put us under the scope of suspicion.

I want to differentiate between the good commitment and the policies that sometimes make you wonder. I hear good things during the course of -- we find ourselves dealing with episodes that contradict that.

Having said that, there are many issues, basically, that our community had to deal with. I am sure that before this committee, we addressed the racial profiling, which has been an ongoing

challenge and never ends. However, after September 11, many tend to make it look like that it is something that was just born as of September 11th and efforts were made, in a sense, to make it legal, to make it become a normal part of our life.

To us, as an Arab American community, the efforts became more conclusive and comprehensive. The complaints that we received here in Michigan exceeded even our ability to deal with them and during the first two months, three months of the crisis, we received over a hundred fifty complaints. I don't recall that a segment of our society that we didn't receive a complaint from. It wasn't just limited to law enforcement, police or FBI or Customs or Immigration. It was from institutions, health institutions, businesses, even areas that were beyond our expectations. That's the concept of it where it hits us, by all means, which at this point of time made us better realize what does it mean to be in the hot seat, as we were placed, and I'm sure that many of us repeat, either joking or what have you, by saying that's it's no longer driving while you are black, it's now flying while you are brown or Arab or Muslim. And I think the concept of racial profiling under no circumstances should be accepted or legitimized of having it part of our lives, as we are witnessing through the many efforts.

The interview process, yes, it was done in a candid way, generally speaking. I think the cooperation between the community and the U. S. Attorney's Office helped have the process go smoother than maybe other scenarios for it. However, it wasn't that rosy. I think we had events where the FBI agents or law enforcement agents tried to trick people with certain questions they wanted to ask. They tried to recruit people. And to us, when we ask the question in the first round and the second round, what was the outcome, it was zero. None of these interviews produced any relevant information. I don't want to take the importance of this process to the government. It was clear that it was more of a psychology assessment to these individuals, trying to hunt like some sort of a hunting in the sea for something and also it was agreed that the law enforcement intended to create contact and have ongoing contact with these and so they become quote, unquote, "informants" and provide information, whatever the government wants them to.

I don't think that there is a justification to that. I don't think this is out of the definition of

the racial profiling, based on gender, age and national origin. To quote the process, it was agreed that the emphasis was that if you don't come to us, we will come to you. But generally speaking, I would say that I'm happy that the cooperation helped at least make the situation more tolerable to our community, but under no circumstances, that this concept was accepted or approved by us. That's why we insisted that these interviews, if they were conducted, we had no choice but to adhere to that. It's not to be conducted without the presence of a legal counsel, because in some interviews there were efforts to, as I said, to trick people, using certain terminology and questions they used.

The second aspect, it was about the many people who were detained by the U. S. Department of Justice, the INS and the FBI. Until today, there is are many captives, their fate is unknown. Up to today, the U. S. Department of Justice is refusing to provide any information and to give any legal access to these people. None of these people were charged with any crime, nor charged with any violation. They have just be detained indefinitely and the U. S. Department of Justice, despite their commitment to working with us, stating really that they are not singling out the community nor targeting the community.

They refuse to provide this basic due process right to these people and a situation that had our organization, as the premiere organization of Arab Americans, many civil rights organizations, ACLU and what have you, to file a lawsuit in order to force the U. S. Department of Justice to provide this basic information about these people.

Also, the challenge that we have to deal with pertaining to the 315,000 who were considered in violation of deportation orders, which we have problems for the government facilities or agents to proceed and do whatever it takes. We are not an advocate for illegal immigration staying in this country. However, there was no logic of justification for the U. S. Department of Justice to choose 6,000 out of the 315,000, to make them high priority and to have an official directive to the agencies that upon arrest of any of these individuals that needs to be placed under indefinite detention and that they be treated simply as a criminal.

Many of the people who were in detention, they were not arrested because of anything

regarding September 11th. So many of them were arrested on minor visa violations, and I'm sure that there are many, for minor violations. There has never been a crime that justifies detention and depriving these people of their basic rights, or being denied bond or the question of a closed hearing. We witnessed the Mr. Haddad case in Michigan, as the U. S. Attorney cited, which we see no justification for those hearings and the use of secret evidence which has been, as mentioned before, in a prior report, that continue to be a challenge to our community, which unfortunately has been enhanced by the passage of the United States Patriot Act, lately.

However, the last issue pertains to fingerprinting and photos of those who come to the country from countries designated or listed by our State Department that have come to harbor or have some sort of, quote, unquote, terrorism activities, that they need to be fingerprinted and photoed, also.

I want to mention quickly, which I will give you a chance to maybe respond to questions or inquiries, if you have any, the recent declaration by the U. S. Department of Justice or the FBI, who lifted restrictions on what we identify as domestic spying, where if you recall the experience of the fifties and sixties and seventies, even, where at that point he was even classified as undesirable, or his contributions or sacrifices, for the concept of the cause of civil rights. We see that those distinctions that were placed by the Supreme Court, they have simply been lifted and any First Amendment activity, any legal activity any group, civic, religious, it doesn't matter, can be subjected to surveillance or spying.

The procedure set for that simply eliminates to the less than even the reasonable minimum level, any accountability, any judicial reviews and keeps the law enforcement as the judge, jury and prosecutor, at the same time. It goes as far as allowing the FBI to decide, on their own, how long, up to a year, they can put such a practice. Even if they didn't find any evidence or probable cause, they still can do it. I think it's pushing back the era of our civil liberties back to the nineteen seventies, in which no citizen -- maybe now we enjoy the hot seat of Arab Americans, but the directives and the policies of the attorney general is moving in the direction to further strip all American citizens from their basic civil liberties.

I will stop there and I will be more than happy to answer any questions. I tried my best to give some sort of quick, inclusive, comprehensive review. Once again, I don't want to take away -- I think last week we had unfortunately to be part of the memorial of the family for Vincent Chin, and the concepts of his crime which we talked about twenty years ago and we talk about it today and we say my God, it's like talking about it this moment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions for Mr. Hamad?

Mr. Hamad, the 150,000 visa violations, were these Middle Easterners or nationwide?

MR. HAMAD: Basically, the men were Middle Eastern. Let's put it this way. Any country that somehow is classified as a country that harbors terrorism is on the list. So you can include all the Middle Eastern countries, including Pakistan and India and other countries.

MR. SALEH: Out of the 315,000 persons who have been ordered deported on filed orders of deportation, they are from all over the world. That could be South America, Europe, anyone and everyone who has an order of deportation, who has not left. Out of that, 6,000 were from Middle East countries or countries that the Attorney General has designated as having the potential for terrorism. So that might include the Philippines, and it is those 6,000 that are being given the priority.

THE CHAIRMAN: The 315,000, I mean they obviously were identified. Were they incarcerated or just free, waiting deportation orders issued? How does that work?

MR. HAMAD: He's been my attorney since 1987 as a former victim of the use of secret evidence. I will leave it to him to clarify that.

MR. SALEH: The 315,000 are persons who have final orders of deportation, they were not taken into custody and they may or may not have left the country. Some of them may have left just on their own and the government isn't aware of it and there's probably a substantial number who just haven't left and just say hey, catch me and then I'm gone. Until you catch me, you know --

MR. HAMAD: The question here is not to question the legal aspects of it. The question is there is no justification to single out 6,000 as a high priority. That clearly indicates treating them as criminals.

MS. HA AJLANI: Ellen Ha. I guess what I'm not clear on, Mr. Hamad, are you then saying that while the U. S. Government is enforcing immigration laws, that when it comes to people of Middle Eastern descent or any people who happen to have come from those countries identified by this country as harboring terrorism, the government is more selectively forceful in enforcing the immigration law on those people versus the rest of the people who have violated the immigration law?

MR. HAMAD: Definitely, with no question.

MS. THOMAS: Did I understand these people are here illegally?

MR. SALEH: Yes

MS. THOMAS: Well, I think they should be sent back.

MS. HA AJLANI: As I understand it, there are 315,000 people who are here illegally but of those, 6,000 are getting special treatment, not necessarily a special treatment but the law seems to be focusing on them more so than the other whatever the balance is of the 315,000?

MR. HAMAD: We say simply there are 315,000 in violation, people, period. Why single out 6,000 and classify them as criminals? What about the 315,000?

MR. HWONG: You are saying that it's not just the low level numbers of apprehension and deportation but they were selected based upon their ethnicity or race?

MR. HAMAD: Definitely, yes.

MR. HOLLIDAY: So you just want fairness across the board?

MR. HAMAD: Yeah. None of us is an advocate for illegal immigration. We are not debating the legal ground for it. We have no problem with it. What we're saying is that it should be inclusive and it should not be selective and the action should be taken against all, period, regardless of color, race or national origin. Even the 315,000, there could be some of them with the criminal charges but you cannot have selective judgment, stating that the 6,000 who happen to be of Middle Eastern descent to have an official directive that treats them as criminal or that they should be subject of such a treatment. Do whatever it takes to deport them; they're in violation. We have no problem with it.

THE CHAIRMAN: How many green card holders of U. S. citizens were you provided with?

MR. HAMAD: There were a few. There were a few cases that were inconsistent with the process of the interviews. This is the first time for me to hear the U. S. Attorney here to say – and we have been meeting on a monthly basis, to say that those interviews were based on the people who entered the country six years ago. It was stated to me as of January 1, 2000 and up. Those people were selected based on their entry to the country, that during their presence in the U. S., it happens that they made travel arrangements out of the country. The countries they are visiting are classified as hot countries. There is where no people of residential status should be included. No people of citizenship should be part of it.

Then, later they said they know who the alien residents are and we proceeded as such. In the case of citizens, when people receive notices, there were very few cases who were United States citizens and yet received the notices. They said it's an error. They adjusted some of it, but we were surprised later to see that they followed someone in another state and we said we settled that and we said what's going on and they adjusted that. In the case of saying we sent the letter and the person did not respond, we witnessed cases where people conducted interviews with their attorneys and yet, sometime later, they went and knocked on their door, saying we want to talk to you, claiming that it was an error, when he tells them I did that and my attorney wasn't there and why are you here. I cannot judge if this was intentional but these things happened. Even in some interviews, people reported to us that the people who conducted the interview took license plates of the cars of the company of the people who were helping the person in question. In some cases, it was agreed that they can have the meeting anywhere they want. In some areas, there was some resistance. It was agreed that a person can bring anyone to the interview if there's a language barrier. In some cases the government side insisted that they wanted to bring their own. We addressed these as they came and I think the response was good cooperation, but it wasn't as rosy as maybe we can describe.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you think the U. S. Attorney may have misstated that time period, accidentally. I think I remembered reading something about 2,500 people --

MR. SALEH: If I am not mistaken, I believe Mr. Collins just misspoke. It was January of 2000, and that was in writing from Washington, D. C.

MR. KOBRAK: Peter Kobrak. When you spoke to us in 1999, you were very articulate about civil liberties problems Arab Americans faced, being held without being charged and so on. Is the problem now that those laws are being enforced more heavily or is it laws since September 11 that are creating more of the problems.

MR. HAMAD: The challenge was there before September 11. As you stated, the use of secret evidence has been a challenge. We thought that we would reach a level where it can be defeated and awareness of it was actually going in the right direction, where many members of Congress adopted and tried to reach a solution. It was a bi-partisan basis. Even Congressman David Bonior and Tom Daschle ratified it. And we saw a movement, even during the presidential election time, it was an issue on the table where both candidates had no choice but to address the use of secret evidence and the use of profiling. We were optimistic that this was coming to a close and to be defeated. However, after September 11, the situation drastically changed and the use of secret evidence and closed proceedings and depriving people of their basic due process rights became to be decided, and this is not something where even cases before it was like more of a typical traditional politically motivated cases. Now, anyone, even with any sort of minor association can be subject to that use and I would say that this is going to continue to be a very chilling challenge for the family of civil rights in general. And I think the passage of the U. S. Patriot Act and the unconditional powers being provided to the law enforcement side, I think is going to make the situation worse.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hamad, thank you. Any final questions?

MS. HA AJLANI: I have a question. Ellen Ha. From the Arab American community perspective, I realize that you might not have all the answers, but in terms of the weighing the balance between the national security interests by the U. S. Government and the concerns that all Americans have, including the Arab Americans, what do you think -- what does the Arab American, the community in general, would propose, so that the policies that are being made in

Washington does not necessarily infringe on the civil liberties or the rights of all Americans? I mean you, as the community, do you have any suggestions or ideas where --

MR. HAMAD: Let's put it this way. I would say that the question of civil liberties is now a challenge before all Americans, period, and the heart of it, definitely the American civil liberties movement, I think the American civil liberties movement is facing a challenge that cannot be compared to any other previous era because of exceptional special circumstances that we go through.

One thing, I don't think the civil liberties family disagrees on, the necessity of ensuring the safety of our nation and protecting its national interests. I think by all means we are very supportive as the Arab American community and others. I don't think this is a question to debate and we are not against enhancing the law enforcement agencies' abilities.

Actually, at the time we were placed under the scope of suspicion and our loyalty was a question and we had to be dealing with the ongoing test of our Americanism, we provided a great deal of assistance to the government and even they recognize that assistance, how valuable it was, that helped them in many directions. And we will continue to do that.

However, we don't see that the price for that are our civil liberties. We don't see a contradiction between moving in that direction and sustaining and preserving our basic civil liberties. Reforms are needed and I think flexibility is needed to address the new challenges that we are facing but let's not go as far as stripping all of us from our basic, precious civil rights. I think history taught us a lot in that regard. An example of our great society here, I think we had at that point of time people had the same debate and then later we recognize how valuable it is and this is what made this nation unique and great. So there is no justification for some voices within our government to take advantage of the political climate, that we agree, as of September 11th, and be aggressive in passing many directives or policies which, as I stated in my comments when I started, maybe it sounds now that it is affecting us as Arab Americans. However, it is going to affect and by all means it will be affecting every American, period. Today, we are enjoying the hot seat. You only wonder who could be next. That's the process. I think that's a

challenge that sets before all minorities. I don't think that we, as an Arab American community, are facing something others did not face. Maybe it's different circumstances, different types of challenges but I think the concept is the same, I think, the Spanish Americans, Arab Americans, Japanese Americans, Polish Americans, African American communities. I think we are, as an Arab American community, we are not going to surrender to intimidation.

We know there is going to be a high price but definitely we are prepared to join hands with the rest of the American civil liberties and fight back. I think it gives us a great deal of pleasure and it is paying the price and being part of the struggle is what made this country as great.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Hamad.

MR. HAMAD: Thank you.

MR. SIBLANI: My name is Osama Siblani, Editor, Publisher of the Arab American News and president of the Arab American Political Action Committee, which is a PAC political organization. It's not very difficult now to spell Osama. That's one of the benefits, since September 11, I don't have to spell my name, Osama. I really want to focus more perhaps on the things that Imad did not focus on, the political rights of Arab Americans who are here legally, have citizenship, like myself and everyone around the table here, that should have the same legal rights and civil rights like any other man. I mean I don't want to sit here and cry about those who violated their visas, even though they have some rights, but the law is the law. Arab Americans want the law to be applied to everyone and we are under the law. But the law gives Arab Americans rights, and those rights are being violated on a daily basis, especially after September 11. It seems like September 11 has been used as a pretext for some to exercise their hate, unfortunately, some of them in high places, some of them in the government. They are using September 11th to abuse the law.

I want to remind everyone in here that the problem is not always on the ground. The problem comes from the top. It's the attitude. If you write the law and the law is fair and the

person who is applying the law is unfair, then the law will be distorted and it will be applied wrong. That's what is happening.

We are not complaining about the laws, even though there are some flaws in them, but there is nothing perfect. The application of the law is the problem. I will give you an example. We were meeting here in Detroit with the Attorney General, Mr. Ashcroft, in fact, in Mr. Collins' office. There was -- the FBI was there, the INS was there. Mr. Ashcroft says, during the conversation -- he was talking to me about it, not directly to me -- but he said that, "You know, Arab Americans should be thankful that what happened to the Japanese Americans didn't happen to them."

Of course, I resented that and I said, "You know, I resent what you just said, Mr. Ashcroft, because the Arab Americans, first of all, Arabs did not declare war on the United States and, number two, we are Americans." And, of course, he backed down. He backed down on his but this is the kind of attitude that you see, unfortunately, in the administration.

I will give you another example of that and this one is very close to us. Spencer Abraham, who happens to be an Arab American, we were meeting with him after Ashcroft, a couple of months or maybe a month and a half. I know Spencer Abraham as a brother but, of course, he is a Republican and there's nothing wrong with it, because I'm a Republican, but the attitude that's coming from the top is disgusting. He repeated the same phrase in a closed meeting, that, "Thank God, you know, you are not treated like the Japanese were." It's that kind of attitude that's coming from the top. That's what is really hurting our community and eventually it will hurt our nation.

They keep saying that Arab Americans do not come out and support the country and we are. Yesterday on Fox News, today on Fox News, the same thing was going on. Why don't Arab Americans come out and say we're willing to cooperate and tell you there is terrorism here. It seems like as if we know and we're not telling. They are sending a signal, a very blunt signal to the community at large, that beware of the Muslim Americans and the Arab Americans next door.

The letters that Mr. Collins was speaking about and Imad was speaking about, that were sent out, you could have done this without the brouhaha of the media. What you are sending out is to the American public, watch your neighbor; he might be one of those 5,000 people who we're looking for.

What happening in this country is beyond description. Civil rights? That's history in my opinion. There are no civil rights anymore. I will go down even to Washington, D. C. and tell you what's happening in the neighborhood and in between, it's the same. According to the United States census of the 2000, it's official, thirty percent of the City of Dearborn are Arabs. They classify themselves as Arabs, thirty percent out of the entire population. And yet, we do not have representation and yet we're being bombarded every day by this administration. I mean now we have to pay fees in order to be protected, in order to express ourselves.

We had a demonstration, a licensed demonstration, to demonstrate in the city. They wouldn't even let us -- they closed the street, and we're talking about 3,000 people. He told me, the police officer told me that, "If you go this way I will ticket you. Walk on the sidewalk."

I said, "We have a permit, we can't walk on the street?" The sidewalk is like this big. But we said okay, the law is the law, we're going to check it out later, and we took the sidewalk. Later, we get a bill for \$600 for police protection. Now, if we have to express ourselves, we pay in the city of Dearborn, we pay. The police officers' composition looks like an occupying force. There isn't a dark complexion in it. I have nothing against white but, you know, you need to have the police force reflective of the composition of the residents of the city.

The attitude of this mayor and his administration is no different than Mr. Ashcroft, only it's close to home on a daily basis. The man sends an eighteen hundred dollar bill to a club that's celebrating something outside their building, as if we don't pay taxes, as if we don't pay enough for the city, as if he does not have enough, you know, expenditures to protect himself. He spends almost \$90,000 a year for details for himself. We pay. Representation. We have no representations.

We had one representative on the City Council on the Dearborn Board of Education. He

lost. Why he lost? Because the mayor and his machine launched a campaign of hate in the city that has been consistent since 1985, since he was elected.

You know, it's becoming ridiculous. Today, if you want to really get ahead in America, you need to bash Arabs. Where are the civil rights? The civil rights have taken a setback. Actually, it's a disaster, nakaba. In Arabic, we say nakaba, it's a disaster. We're not talking about the Arab Martin Luther King. It's much worse than that. It has become like September 11 is a pretext to bash Arabs and Muslims and it's okay. And no, it is not okay. It is not okay because you see those 6,000 people that we're talking about in the Immigration detention, that violated their visas. I don't personally have a problem, you know, obeying the law and telling them to go and apply. What I'm having a problem with are people like us, who were born and raised in this country, that this is our country. Where are we going to go?

It's unfair, what's happening to our kids in school. They cannot play. They are being spat at after September 11. We did not commit anything wrong here, and I think that the Civil Rights Commission has a duty today, more than the United States Army, to protect the civil liberties in America because, I tell you, it's not like – I don't want to sit here and say today Arabs do more than somebody else. I truly believe that America here is at stake, the constitution, what made this country great, and more importantly, me as a human being, being harassed on a daily basis, when you see people being shot at because they're Arabs.

An Arab man was sleeping with an American woman who happened to have a boyfriend, an old boyfriend, who was an American. After September 11th, this American boyfriend, in the heat of the September 11, after that, took a gun, shot and he killed his ex-girlfriend's lover and said – went out and said, "I killed him because he's an Arab and I couldn't just, you know, control myself." I mean this is the kind of stuff that we are afraid that will happen. Our kids are scared. Our women, they can't go to the market with their scarf on. I'm not really exaggerating here. I'm just telling you that this is going on. People cannot speak anymore. I mean they have polls after polls, you know, they say Arab Americans, it's fine with them to have profiling. What do you expect them to do? They're scared. It's not reflective of the truth. No one will say well it's

okay, you know, come and step on me, it's fine. Then, the question is how do you balance security with civil rights. I would say look around in the world. Look around the world. I travel and I think some of you or most of you travel around. It's been going on for a long time. Ten years ago fifteen years ago, I used to go overseas to Europe, the Middle East. You go on a plane, you are searched like everybody else. You stand in line. You go two hours early and you get your luggage checked. You go through a security process, whether you are yellow, brown, black or white, the same procedure. Everybody goes through the same gate. The luggage is checked the same way and there is no suspicions of any activities because you are Japanese looking or you can belong to the Red Army, if you are a redhead, then you are Irish, probably belong to the IRA. It is the law. You write the law and you apply it to everyone.

What is happening here is that the law is not to be applied to everyone but the people who are applying the law are picking and choosing and there are political forces in this country, unfortunately, using September 11th in a way to bash Arabs and Muslims and take their political rights and civil rights away, and we should not let this happen. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Any questions?

MS. HA AJLANI: Ellen Ha. Mr. Siblani, if I hear you correctly, are you saying that it's not the law but the application of the law that the Arab American community has trouble with, and you had mentioned -- well, you didn't mention it and I gather what you are talking about is, for example, the wiretapping and usage of secret evidence.

Are you saying that these laws are applied more so against the Arab Americans or people of Middle Eastern descent more so than any other ethnic people?

MR. SIBLANI: First of all, let me tell you that secret evidence and profiling is a failing law. It has been proven. It was before September 11th. We were fighting profiling before September 11th. Actually, profiling was in force before September 11th. It didn't prevent September 11th and today, today, you ask Mr. Ashcroft and everyone down to the little guy in the Justice Department, is what you are doing right now going to prevent attacks against Americans, and they will say no.

What you are doing is harassing innocent people. That's what you are doing. It is a failing policy. Secret evidence and profiling, you can profile, profiling is good. You can profile based on records, not based on color, not based on ethnicities, not based on religion, but based on records. If a criminal record is there, then you profile someone.

MS. HA AJLANI: But you are saying that the government, when they make the laws and when they actually apply the laws, the government is profiling the Arab American people, people of Middle Eastern descent, when they are applying it.

MR. SIBLANI: I didn't say I don't have a problem with the law. I mean the law has some loopholes in it, but, come on, I mean the people who are interpreting the Bible today and the Koran and the Torah, they're interpreting it in their own way.

I mean the law is not as pure as the words of God. But there is some problem with the law, but the problem, the bigger problem and the biggest problem, in my opinion, is how you are applying the law. Imad said something interesting, that Jeffery Collins, in this town, that the way he approached it, the way he handled it, the way he's applying the law, it was rough but he tried to smooth it down because he's a good man, but in other areas, the law was abused.

You're saying, well, we're going to interview these people. All right. Bring them in, send the military to bring them in. They sent a letter saying we would like to meet with you, where would you like to meet. The law is to interview these people. The way you do it, you get there and the way you conduct your interviews is the way you apply the law and the way that it was applied in Michigan, regardless of how harsh it was, it was less harsh than it was applied somewhere else. That's my point. I mean I'm not saying that the law is so pure and fine and dandy, no. I said that there are some loopholes in the law, but the way you apply the law is what I'm worried about.

MS. THOMAS: Larrain Thomas. You stated that Spencer Abraham made the statement that he made. Of course, you and I know that Spencer is Lebanese. I happen to have worked with Spencer for seven and a half years as his co-chair and I know that Spencer loves his people and I know that Spencer would not say -- he may have said that they were fortunate that we weren't

doing the same thing to the Arabs that we did to the Japanese, but I know that Spencer did not mean anything --

MR. SIBLANI: I said I love the guy and he is, you know, from the Arab American community and I know him and I worked very hard on his campaign. I was disappointed that he lost it. I said that it comes from the top. He is in the circle where he is hearing this kind of stuff.

MS. THOMAS: But he would not side with anyone else --

MR. SIBLANI: He wouldn't side but he's carrying a message that he has heard it from the inner circle of Mr. Bush.

MS. HA AJLANI: May I just make a comment? With regard to the Japanese American interment camp, that, to me, was a physical incarceration of a people of some -- incarceration and infringement on their rights, based on their national origin.

MS. THOMAS: Japan had declared war, so it's a different situation.

MS. HA AJLANI: But I don't think that in light of this situation, you don't necessarily have to imprison and incarcerate Arab Americans and I don't think that having made that mistake before, that this government would choose that sort of venue.

But what I am concerned about is that if you chip away people's rights based on their national origin and limit their freedom, then you can't be technically incarcerated within your home confines, because now I'm afraid to go out because somebody out there might see me as a terrorist because I appear this way. So the physical incarceration does not necessarily have to happen, but what I think the ultimate concern of every citizen of the United States should be, being the fact that we all came from other countries, is that we should be concerned with the chipping away of the civil rights and Mr. Siblani and Mr. Hamad, you were right, this time it is the Arab Americans, last time it was the Japanese Americans. I don't know who is going to be the next time. But this little chipping away and the application and how we interpret the law and how we enforce the law selectively against some national people based on some national origin or based on some religious background, that concerns me because if you keep on chipping away people's civil liberties and civil rights, that can be construed as a limitation of their freedom and

it can be an incarceration of the people of that origin, be it the national origin or religious origin.

MR. SIBLANI: I just wanted to make it clear for the record that I did not believe that Spencer Abraham feels this way. What I was trying to imply here is that the mood of this administration, unfortunately is a kind of -- I mean I said this to Mr. -- when they were in town, can't we do something about Mr. Ashcroft. I mean slow him down, this is becoming ridiculous. You know, I know that some other people wanted to say the focus may be a different subject. But the only way we can fight terrorism and continue to have our civil rights and civil liberties in this country and to maintain and preserve the greatness of our nation, is to integrate the Arab community into the -- the way you integrate them is to put them in jobs. We have been saying to the FBI -- the first time that I mentioned this was in 1985, right after the TWA hijacking. I told the FBI and the media directly, please hire Arab Americans. Today, 2002, I am still saying the same thing to the FBI, same thing with the police, same thing with the sheriffs. Our kids are fifty percent, at least in some areas, of the school population. They're fifty percent of the school population of Dearborn. On the board of education, we do not have an Arab American. I mean this is unfair. Don't you think that this is unfair? We need to be participating in making decisions. This is the kind of stuff that you bring in Arab Americans, they become a part of the system and they start integrating into the system, contributing, at the same time feeling that they are part of the country. Now, we are on the outside, we are being pushed out further and further and I hope that your report will include the recommendation that Arab Americans and Muslim Americans should be included in the system and, if not elected, appointed.

I'm glad to see always on the Civil Rights Commission we have an Arab American. We have a fine one right now. I believe that we must be everywhere, so we can start the process of integration going, rather than isolation. Otherwise, the country will pay, not us only. We will pay first, and we will pay heavily, but the entire nation will pay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you take a minute to elaborate on the situation in the schools? Are the school administrators doing anything to protect the kids?

MR. SIBLANI: The schools are fine. I'm not saying that the administration is bad, no. The kids

are okay. Dearborn schools are suffering from the same thing that other schools are suffering from. I believe that because of the culture differences, you know, I mean we have seen today more principals being appointed from the Arab community than before. We have like four of them appointed recently to schools. That's okay and that's fine.

I think it's important that we continue to make progress on the integration of putting Arab Americans -- we want good principals. We don't want an Arab American principal; we want a good principal in the schools. We want good people to teach our kids but we need also to look at the cultural aspect of it and try to integrate the cultural aspect of it into the decision-making.

When we have seven board members and none of them are Arab Americans, sitting there and making decisions on behalf of fifty percent of the kids who happen to be Arab, we need some input there. I think that we cannot get a fair chance in the city, because the system, the way we have it, we're fifty percent and yet we cannot elect anybody, because of the history of Dearborn, unfortunately, because of the administration's attitude of how to conduct itself.

I mean one of the things that Imad gave you here -- and I encourage you to read this -- because after September 11, there were elections in Dearborn and the mayor was meeting on a weekly basis with Arab Americans to discuss issues with them. Right after December, right after he was elected, there were no longer meetings. So we were surprised the next day, that he formed a Homeland Security base. We don't even know that he did it.

Since then, I am not aware personally that the mayor has met with a group of Arab Americans on the same frequency or at least on the same premises that he used to before the election. So that's one of the problems that we have to keep addressing. I can promise you one thing, that we will continue to be good Americans and good human beings. We do want to participate. We are not going to back down. We will continue to be part of the process and the civil rights process in the country but also need your help, as well, when you do your report, to make sure that we have those kinds of issues that we need to address.

MR. KOBRAK: You are the editor of the Arab American newspaper and I am sure you express some of these views in your editorials. What kind of reaction are you getting from Caucasians?

Do you hear from very many and what kind of things do they say?

MR. SIBLANI: I'm a weekly newspaper. My readership is in the Arab American community and some white Americans, they read my paper. I go on the radio and mainstream publications and I talk about these issues, but I think whatever I do, it's immediately erased by what Fox brings in and other conservative media.

The memory lapse of the American public, because of the information, is so short, less than twenty-four hours. So you need to remind these people all the time that we're part of the system, we're good Americans. It's like we're sitting here all the time apologizing for the way we are. I mean I have nothing to do with -- I'm very happy with the way I am but I did not form myself like this. I happen to be a person, a Muslim and an Arab that came from Lebanon, but I came here on my choice and I love this country and I want to contribute and I want to thank the country and contribute to the country and, instead, I am resented and harassed every day. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Siblani. Why don't we break.

(A recess was taken.)

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THE CHAIRMAN: State your name, please, for the record.

MR. AHMED: My name Ismael Ahmed. I am executive Director of ACCESS, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, which is a human services provider and advocacy organization here in the Detroit area. We are thirty-one years old. That's who I am. I want to talk a little bit about the situation of the past September 11th, but I would like to preface it by saying that there were prior to September 11th -- and I noticed in your last report, a list of some of the civil rights challenges that existed in the Arab American community prior to September 11th -- specifically, secret evidence, also an erosion of the rights of immigrants generally and a loss of due process of immigrants and what already existed as different modes of profiling, especially in the airways.

Finally, what was less public was a level of surveillance by the FBI and other government

organizations in the community, going back as far as Operation -- I'm forgetting what it was called.

MR. HWONG: Desert Storm?

MR. AHMED: No. This goes all the way back to Nixon, when the FBI visited just about every Arab leader, asking one question, "Are you or do you work with or are you aware of terrorism," regardless of the likelihood that that person would have any contact. My own grandmother was visited and asked that question not long after we established ACCESS. So there is a history.

There's also a history of government plans on how to deal with Arabs in crisis, which includes a plan to incarcerate Arab Americans in the same way as the Japanese were. And that plan, by the way, was never completely shelved; it was just put aside.

Since September 11th, there was obviously quite the backlash and there are some who say that it could have been worse. And anything can be worse, but here in Michigan, as other speakers have noted, there was a murder that was clearly aligned with the person being an Arab American. There were hundreds of incidents of minor violence and some not so minor violence and thousands of hate letters and E-mails. I also have to say that those were balanced somewhat by a much larger number of supportive letters and E mails and phone calls by especially leadership people and to say, civil rights activists in the city. That has not ended, in particular.

Let me read this. This came on E-mail to me. "You are a filthy creature. Your entire family is garbage. Muslims are inferior to white people." This is a response to, I guess, an article that I have not even seen but this clearly person follows the Arab American community, has fairly intimate knowledge. I won't read the whole thing. It's talking about a historical situation with Sadam Hussein. It concludes, "So it is evident that all Arabs are scum, are faggots and their women are all whores." "You suck camels," et cetera.

There's two pages on this one. "Dear Sand Nigger. Who in their right mind would go to your stinking, filthy, stupid, filthy Arab whorehouse and see a bunch of stinking, ugly rag head trash." Attacks against religion, Arab women. I thought this was cute, followed with a great big picture of a ham. I guess that's supposed to upset Muslims.

Even the wife of a person who works at ACCESS received a letter remarking on the Arab festival. "Your Arab festival is an f'ing joke, as the real American people know that you sand niggers are a bunch of terrorists and are killers of innocent people. So any curiosity about your culture is an f'ing joke." It's two pages long. I won't go on. It has a picture of an older man and woman who drew the response.

Some of these, this one included, actually have the address and the phone number and the E-mail number of people. They feel quite comfortable doing these kinds of things. I say this to say that the atmosphere, while probably somewhat less dangerous in terms of physical attacks, has not really fundamentally changed and that it is important that we be active in taking this on. We did prosecute one case through the sheriff's office and through the prosecutor's office, of an E mail sent to over 2000 Arab Americans. We happened to be a recipient of that and we took the person to court. He was found guilty, plea-bargained, and he sent them all from California. He said he did it in anger but he looked up 2000 addresses, so I don't believe he had -- I believe he did have the time to think and so we had him -- we made an agreement with the judge for him to work at ACCESS for ten days, because we did not believe he was a member of a hate group but needed to adjust his head.

So having said all that, and I really don't want to concentrate in that area but what I wanted to say is that hate is alive and well right here in the city that we live in and there is a substantial group of people who are confused, at best, about who Arab Americans are. What I really want to attack is what I think some of the other speakers have talked to, and that is civil rights challenges that are institutionalized.

First, I would like to say that I also believe that there are people in leadership levels, especially Attorney General Ashcroft, who have used them to change the nature of America. We now have what I think is an untenable situation for the long hall, because much of what has passed as law is only beginning to be implemented. I witnessed, for instance, the amalgamation of Homeland Security, where groups like the Immigration office will now have as their highest priority keeping tabs on people and looking into their backgrounds or many other offices whose

central theme is not security but doing other practical operations of the government. I think this is an example of the direction that we are headed in, generally.

Let me start, because there are a few areas -- and I will try to be brief, but I think that we're talking about, first of all, there has been a larger erosion of the rights of immigrants, generally. Immigrants in this country were considered legal citizens in waiting. They had a status just short of citizenship. That has been eroded on several front. They no longer are eligible and, frankly, this is not just through the Republican administration. They no longer are eligible for general assistance, even if they have been here twenty years. Medicaid, which is causing a tremendous problem in terms of the shortfall for hospitals and health providers in the city and many other human service programs, their position in society generally has been downgraded.

In terms of immigration law, it's been a sea change there, in terms of who and what gets into the country, what rights immigrants have, what due process they have in hearings. Any immigration attorney can enumerate much of this, much of the appeals process and other processes have been torn away.

Also, for immigrants, they have become the greatest target of secret evidence, which is now being used wholesale, that at one point after September 11, over 2000 people were held under secret evidence without any evidence, without, in many cases, anyone else knowing that they were picked up and there are still hundreds held with this situation. In talking to Secretary O'Neill and the head of Homeland Security, Mr. Ridge, when we asked them for the names and the charges against these people, we were told that it's public and we asked why, then, were twenty civil rights organizations suing him for those names. We were then told they'll look into it. I have yet to hear anything back.

Secret evidence now is no longer an anomaly to be worked on or to be looked at as an experiment and moved away. Secret evidence is now a standard part of immigration and law enforcements activity. People are held on -- those that are charged are often charged with immigration problems that, in fact, are so minor and have never been --these charges have never been used to hold people up or hold them back from moving onto citizenship, and they now are.

○ These are not, in the main, guilty people.

I will give you the example of two people who were clients at ACCESS, who the government and the FBI have, over and over again, said that they are not being considered as terrorists and yet they were held and I'm not sure if they're still being held. These kinds of instances and treatment of immigrants is particularly scary. We believe that immigrants' position in society is part of the lifeblood of the society. They contribute more per capita than average Americans, in terms of economic contribution and take out less per capita. So economically, it doesn't make sense. They clearly have been what spawns the next generation of Arab Americans -- I'm sorry -- Americans. It's just the opposite of the direction that we have been moving in and I know psychically, that we have a real war time because I would not consider what we have going on a war, when you don't know which country you are going to hit next and there is no limit or goals to it. But during real war time we have also seen these and, in some cases, much more brutal treatment of immigrants, but it's still one worth responding to. Nor is the civil rights challenges limited to immigrants. We see profiling of Southeast Asians, Arabs and some African Americans. It's funny because we used to look like African Americans, now they look like us, so they get punished. But we see a system of profiling, one that is accepted and respected by law enforcement.

○ The airline companies and – you know, it is a joke. Recently, I went to the airport with the head of the Arab Chamber of Commerce and the director of the Arab Chamber of Commerce. We were flying to meet the head of the Arab League. Each of us had a little X on our ticket and when we went forward, they would say the randomly selected. They would give my name and those other two people's names and then we would go to the next station and they would say they're randomly selected and it would be the three of us again. So there clearly is a small amount of random selection but the majority selection is targeted toward people with Arabic names, who come from other countries or from Arabic countries or who have traveled in those countries, people of Arabic backgrounds. There's just no denying that.

○ Nor is this limited to the air, anymore. We have truck drivers pulled over in their regular

truck driving. Apparently, Arabs are security risks to truck driving, and many, many, other kinds of traffic stops, not unlike African Americans, frankly. We have had Boy Scouts hanging out camping and on their way to Mackinaw pulled over and arrested because -- I'm sorry, detained is the right word -- detained because they were taking pictures of the Mackinaw Bridge and had fatigues on.

I can go on and on. The point being that here in America today, Arab Americans are a clear target, citizens or non-citizens. And we expect that that is going to be the direction of the future more so. We expect to see the NSA, the FBI and other unknowing interested parties tapping the phones of all Arab American major organizations. I do not have a conversation on my phone anymore that I wouldn't want to shout out to the world. I'm talking about personal stuff. I just think it makes me vulnerable. I think most Arab Americans believe that is the case. Since our history of phone taps prior to this was often catching the government doing that, we know that pretty much every institution is now being reviewed.

We believe that there is a systematic attack on civil rights. We believe that the attack not only targets Arab Americans but in fact, erodes the civil rights of all people, wiretaps in general, new laws that allow people to do break-ins and all that other kind of stuff. And the scariest part of all, these are not temporary laws, in the main. They have no sunsets. In talking to legislators about how these laws were passed, most legislators did not read, did not have the opportunity to read the United States Patriotism Act. You can go and ask any legislator in this city and they will tell you they didn't get a chance to read it but they felt compelled to vote on it. Only a few of them, a handful of Congress people, in the end, were willing to stand up to this. That's scary to me. We can only hope that the country will come to its senses. Unfortunately it's my belief that because this is targeted to a very small sector of the society right now, most Americans have not had the chance to feel the cost of this, in terms of their regular civil rights and because of that, we think the education task is larger and it lies with committees like this today to speak out, as difficult as that is. Thank you, very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: We will take questions for about two minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Boy Scout incident, how long were those kids held up?

MR. AHMED: They were held up for about four hours.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any apologies?

MR. AHMED: No, I don't know if they were apologized to or not. We can give you the information about the Boy Scouts and you can get testimony from them. We have videotape testimony. There was a panel on profiling lead by Buzz Thomas and several state legislators, which I would strongly suggest you include in your report. It's a four-hour report of person after person talking about very specific incidents.

THE CHAIRMAN: Will you send a copy of that to our --

MR. AHMED: I don't have a copy but it's available through Buzz Thomas' office.

THE CHAIRMAN: Can we have copies of those letters.

MR. AHMED: I can make copies and give them to you.

THE CHAIRMAN: None of the hate mail mentions non-Muslims, I assume?

MR. AHMED: No, it does not. They obviously are operating from a stereotype.

MR. KOBRAK: Peter Kobrak. You were talking about a plan to incarcerate Arab Americans under certain conditions. I wonder if you could elaborate on that.

MR. AHMED: I believe that took place during the Bush administration, Bush 1. I might be wrong. It might precede that a little, which again makes the argument it doesn't matter whether you are Democrat or Republican in charge, they both have a great deal of fear of the Arab American population, one that is clearly not founded. I think it's important to note that there has never been an Arab American implicated in an act of terrorism on United States soil.

THE CHAIRMAN: There was an actual X on your airline ticket?

MR. AHMED: Yes. That's normal procedure.

THE CHAIRMAN: I fly a lot and I have witnessed what they call the random picks, but there is an X on the ticket?

MR. AHMED: Yes. In fact, I asked one of the airline employees, an African American man, I got the ticket and I said, "No X on my ticket." It was the one time I had never gotten an X on my

ticket. I said, "Why no X?" And he pointed to his name plate and he had a Muslim name.

THE CHAIRMAN: So it's the ticket agent that makes --

MR. AHMED: I don't think so. I think that there is a profile and it may be the ticket agent had some choice in it.

MS. THOMAS: When you get your ticket, is it a paper ticket? I have a ticket now at home --

MR. AHMED: I see the X'es on the paper tickets. I have certainly gotten profiled the other way, too, with E tickets.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anybody else?

(No questions were posed by the committee members.)

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. AHMED: Thank you.

(A recess was taken.)

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MR. HWONG: Can you indicate for the record your full name and we can proceed.

MR. HAISHA: My name is Robert Peter Haisha. I am with the Arab American Chaldean Council. My last name is spelled H-a-i-s-h-a. For the record, on behalf of the Arab American Chaldean Council, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak before you and update the committee on the impact of September 11th on the Arab-American Chaldean community.

Just a little bit about the council. We are a 501C3 nonprofit agency. We have the largest Arab American human services area in the country. We have served, in our history since 1979, well over a hundred thousand individuals and last year alone, we served over 80,000 individuals and provided services to the Arab-American Chaldean community. We do a great deal of work in the refugee community, especially that in Detroit and Wayne County. We have an extensive amount of medical and psychological support that has increased dramatically since September 11th and as an agency, we have taken a hugely proactive role in addressing some of the concerns that have resulted from September 11th.

For us -- just as an aside, I was sitting here throughout the day listening, as you have, and

can you believe that you would be hearing in this day, the kind of testimony that you have been hearing? I was sitting back in the corner, not believing that I was hearing what I was hearing. Having worked with this community for a number of years, both the United States Census Department and helping them actually put on the census operation where we would spend a great deal of time going to the Middle Eastern community and saying the government is not bad, when you talk to the government, it's safe, everything you say will not be used any other way except to provide information on behalf of the census and so on. We spent three years, prior to the census being taken, going out and affirmatively talking to the members of the Middle Eastern community to help encourage them to speak more candidly and to fill out the forms and to respond to people coming to their door, because in countries where many of these individuals come from, when a member of the government comes to your door, it's not actually a man coming to visit you with a check. The Arab-American and Chaldean community is also different than what is perceived by the mainstream. For example, the majority of Arab American Chaldeans in Southeastern Michigan reside in the tri-county areas but most reside in Oakland and Macomb Counties. The perception of people who look much like I do is that we are mainstream. I was born in Detroit, both my boys were born here and they are of Arab American and Chaldean descent. My wife was born in Baghdad and immigrated here at an early age and is an elected official and is a prosecutor in Macomb County.

You know, the perceptions are what we fight. For us, the world did change September 11th. We at the council have taken a very proactive role. The first thing we did, when the events were still occurring because they occurred over about a half an hour or forty-minute time span, depending on which incident, we issued a release condemning the incident immediately. We issued in the same release support for our president and our country. We immediately put together a list of law enforcement agencies, including the Civil Rights Commission, and passed the telephone numbers out and information sheets out to members of our communities, because if they experienced anything negative, they would have a number to call. We received hundreds of phone calls, as Ismael also have said, the majority of which support people of good will, know

that we weren't directly involved or implicated in this, but we did receive the vehement, violent calls that he alluded to, that he read. Those, again, I couldn't believe that I'm actually hearing those.

We immediately put together a task force that did nothing but address these issues, folks from the council that had different backgrounds. You know, I have a legal background, another person has a psychology background, another person has a sociology background, another person has law enforcement background, and so on. We all got together and began to developing a task force to begin addressing some of the concerns.

One area of concern had to do with who are Arab Americans and Chaldeans, where do they live, what are their professions. We needed to break the stereotype. If you take a look in the last ten years, I believe or fifteen years, they had over ninety-nine movies that where terrorism was a theme in the movie. How many instances or how many movies do you think depicted anyone other than a person of Middle Eastern descent as the terrorist? I don't expect you to respond. One. Ninety-eight other films out of the ninety-nine that showed terrorism as a theme in the movies, only one had non-Middle Eastern cultures being that. So our biggest challenge was, one, overcoming the stereotype, getting the correct information out and getting people out in terms of media support, community support, to be able to address fears.

Our largest number of calls were from the academic community. Schools wanted us to appear and to give presentations, put together a task force. A number of individuals from the task force, we have been doing these presentations for years but never in such volume, where we have to actually take people off of their regular assignments over a very short period of time to get them to volunteer their time, which, most of the time, which we had to do to get people to go to schools and work with academics and educators.

The next area of concern came from governmental entities. What they wanted to know was how we can help. I got a call from the city manager of one of the larger cities in Macomb County immediately. This is the same day and he said, "How can I help? What can I do? Can you come here and talk to my folks? What is it that we can do," that very day. That kind of

outpouring was heartening to a certain extent but we knew we had a challenge. The volume began to increase. The number of calls began to increase, more and more in terms of content and presentation. The scope increased not just understanding the Arab American and Muslim community but understanding Islam. Just as you often hear the phrase "Arab terrorist" you also hear "Muslim extremist" and it's one word, it's hyphenated but it's one word, and we had to make we sure that we understood and others understood how those stereotypes and those inaccuracies need to be dispelled.

We then began to feel that there was a real serious need to have a coordinated, complete, substantive program that was consistent throughout all of the venues we participated. We went out and developed the Cultural Tapestry Initiative. Being that we're a large organization, and principally funded by states funds, we could not use state forms. We took it on ourselves to go out to the private sector to develop Cultural Tapestry Initiatives, partners with Kellogg and the Knight Foundations, put together a program. The program was the result of a significant number of individuals, community and governmental leaders and institutions, generally concerned about the impact of terrorism and the ensuing war abroad to fight terrorism.

What we did was we consolidated all of our cultural outreach and sensitivity training, targeted civic groups, academic groups, business organizations, health care community members and law enforcement. We went to them and said this is what we have, this is the resources that we have, how does it best fit in for you and we will help you alleviate some of your concerns. And the response has been truly overwhelming.

We are constantly trying to work with other organizations to dispel stereotypes. We can sit and talk, and I want to endorse everything that Mr. Ahmed said to you. Everything was right on all the feelings, all the instances. All the policy issues that he raised are all viable, they are right on and you should take them, you know, as wholeheartedly as you can, because he is precisely right. But what do you do to change it? We talk about it and talk about it and talk about it. You change perception. It is not easy to accept a person speaking ill of another person, where what is being said is based on racial stereotypes and those types of negative comments associated

with them.

I have two young boys. I have a three-year-old and I have a one-year-old, and we are helping raise my two little boys and making sure that they understand how to perceive others. After all of this was unfolding after September 11, I began to realize that what I have to do, as a member of the Chaldean and Arab American community is to help educate the people around me and make sure they understand, in addition to fighting for the rights that we need to. In addition to law enforcement rights, the biggest thing that we can do is educate those members of our society, so that it's not okay to say whatever it is, the kinds of comments that were made.

My son can't say the word "stupid" because that's a derogatory term, cannot use the word "fat" because we don't want that to be part of their language as they grow up. We don't want to have a part in the language that is derogatory - comments based on racial and ethnic stereotypes. The moment we allow that to occur, the moment that we allow that to continue and it is acceptable to profile, it's acceptable to do that, we begin going down that slippery slope the minute we allow that to happen.

I keep going back. This is a matter of raising a child, a child that's gone out of control, that is free to speak and say whatever they wish without any retribution because no one is there to say no. That's the environment that we're in. It's up to you and your colleagues around the country and the Commission as a whole, to begin to address the issue, without fear of being called an unpatriotic American. Maybe we've got problems. We need to say that because the environment that we live in now is that if you are critical of any effort whatsoever, you are somehow less than an American, less than a citizen. That's the environment that we are in right now. Nothing is perfect. Certainly, I have worked on legislation, personally. I have worked with elected officials. No legislation is perfect, but to be subject to very, very harsh criticism when raising faults that may exist within that and having your ability questioned, your patriotism questioned, your citizenship questioned -- I was born here, my parents are both from Baghdad. My wife is from Baghdad. My two little boys are going to grow up in this country and I have to ensure that there is a world for them that doesn't say because your mom came from or your last

name is similar to, or you live in a community that, you are somehow a lesser American.

What I would like to do is just leave you with the image of raising children in this world and how you should take your duties back to your colleagues and say we need to fix this problem, because society has lost its ability to self-control its speech and we need to say no, just like we have to say no to a child when they do something wrong, and need not be fearful that others will look at us differently because we're now saying no to a child.

Any questions?

THE CHAIRMAN: Has the Chaldean community experienced problems similar to the larger Arab communities? I mean the scale of problems, can you differentiate, at all?

MR. HAISHA: Sure. The Chaldean Community is in the Oakland/Macomb area, although we do have -- because we own businesses, the Chaldean community, we have been the targets of hate crimes. I recall within days of September 11th, there was a sign that was put up across the street from a competing business that said "This is an American-owned business." And across the street was the same type of business and somehow there was a distinction. Mind you, the owner, I happen to know, is born and raised here in Detroit and is as American as anyone else.

THE CHAIRMAN: Which street was that; do you recall?

MR. HAISHA: I would rather not identify --

THE CHAIRMAN: I thought I remember seeing the sign. That's what I asked.

MR. HAISHA: It was broadcast immediately on the news. Stations went out there and the sign came down. There was another instance where there was an inflatable figure that was put up, that somehow distinguished that business from adjacent businesses that were not owned by someone whose ancestor didn't come on the Mayflower or were here shortly thereafter.

We have endured this for quite some time. Underneath, you have to put it in perspective and have somewhat of a sense of humor about it, otherwise, that in this country this can still happen. The Chaldean community, who own a lot of businesses, have been a ripe target, because one of the Chaldean -- there are no Chaldean Muslims. We're Catholic, actually, Roman Catholic. And Chaldeans tend to live in one area and tend to work in another and they have their

businesses and there is criticism, especially between the Middle Eastern community and the African American community, there is a specific base of conflict there that needs to be addressed. It's just sort of compounded. We tend not to wear any outward signs of religious affiliation, so we haven't been the subject of the kind of directed bigotry that our friends and brothers and sisters in the Muslim community have.

But certainly there is no less place in our heart for that, and all you have to do is go to a person whose name is Ibrahim or Bazzi or anything else that does not sound western European, to know that -- you know, when you are rejected for something or you are not treated with the level of respect that you feel you ought to be, there's some basis for that outside of a scope of a person just not being a polite individual.

MR. KOBRAK: Peter Kobrak. Have they lost money as a result of these lost customers?

MR. HAISHA: Initially, some have. We tend to own staple businesses, like food, gas and beverages and so on. So at some point, unless you, you know, abstain from that -- we have the largest owners of independent food and beverage markets in the tri-county area. So unless you abstain from that, you tend to eventually go back and some people realize that, you know, initially, America is a sleeping giant. They woke it. It's hard to put this genie back in the bottle. It just won't. So initially we had some problems that were overt. Now, our biggest fear is what is not overt, more sophisticated, and it takes people who have seen the patterns before to say, "Ah, there it is," because it may not be as overt or as blatant as that individual who found it acceptable to shoot an individual and as a form of defense say that person is of Middle Eastern descent. Now it's subtle. It's something that African American Communities and other communities have faced for years. We're just, unfortunately, now added to that and share their struggle.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any conflict with the African American community that is measurable?

MR. HAISHA: That goes beyond it? We did have an individual that was kind of going around raising the issue. What was interesting is after September 11th, we didn't have same sort of problem to the extent that -- it was overshadowed. Part of that was Americanism. The patriotism that we had overcame that, initially. I thought it was kind of an interesting situation, where

before you said you are not treating me or my community with the level of respect you think we ought to receive, and we're confrontational about it, I think the communities rose above that and said we have got bigger fish to fry and we will take care of that at another point, suppressed some of their antagonism.

But that's somewhat heartening. We have overcome, to some extent, based on our patriotism that we are all Americans and we can look at each other that way. That's the kind of conduct I'm talking about. The conflict was still there, still existed, but the perception was it's not as bad as we think it is, there are things that are worse or we're better than that.

That's the kind of perception that we want to foster, because the change in perspective, we can change attitudes and begin to work on problems. As long as there's anger and there's this conflict, you are never going to overcome the kind of actions that lead to violence, that lead to discrimination, that lead to pettiness, in some cases, based on nothing other than a look at a person's face, the color of their skin and what they wear.

MS. HA AJLANI: Do you believe that the Chaldean Americans here in Michigan have similar concerns about secret evidence and profiling and wiretapping as the Arab Americans?

MR HAISHA: Absolutely. You know, a lot of folks tried to draw the distinction between our two communities, in that we tend to live in Oakland and Macomb Counties. We're not really part of the Dearborn community or the Wayne community, as a whole, but we walk into the same airports, we raise our children in the same schools. We are subject to infringements of our rights as our Arab American Muslim brothers and sisters are, but more so, I think, because we face them as Americans. Once you begin to erode the civil rights of a particular class or category or particular racial makeup of a group of people that share those characteristics, the day will come, it will come when yours will, and the minute that a person, an attorney, a government, attorneys goes to federal judge or goes to any judge and wants a warrant, if they have been issuing warrants based on the criteria for one person, there's a sense of we have got to make it equal, we have got to make it the same. They will be more compelled or accepting to issuing warrants to other classes of individuals because they're used to it, it's perfectly acceptable conduct. The

wiretaps and the surveillance and everything else is still there. Anyone that tells you because we don't live in Dearborn, don't live in Wayne County, because we don't wear a hajib, that somehow we're isolated from it --

MS. THOMAS: But you have a large segment around Seven Mile Road?

MR. HAISHA: We do. We have 12,000 to 15,000, largely immigrants, in the Seven-Woodward area of the 130,000 some Chaldeans that are here, there's a relatively small population in the area that we call the Chaldean Town. We share those and our support and our commitment to our brothers and sisters, it's no different, because in that sense, we are no different. We come from the same land.

MS. HA AJLANI: Were any of the Chaldeans subject to interviews?

MR. HAISHA: None that I know of. You have to also take a look at the date. It was 2000. It was from certain countries where people had immigrated and under certain categories. The vast number in the ninety-odd plus percent came before that or came as refugees, more than anything else, rather than -- you would know better about how to distinguish those. So it was statistically possible for that to have occurred. I don't know of any and it was not brought to our attention that any Chaldeans were interviewed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir.

MR. HAISHA: Thank you.

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THE CHAIRMAN: Will you state your name and spell your name for the record.

MS. AMEN: Yes, I will. Lila Amen, Dearborn Public Schools Community Liaison.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MS. AMEN: Again, I will repeat myself, in spite of sounding ignorant, of what I'm doing here. I did copy the paperwork that we had sent out through the Dearborn Public Schools, in order to stop before everything started and aggravations that the students may have been up against. I will not say that things didn't happen inside the school system. Yes, they did, but I don't think half the

degree as some of the other districts, because we moved immediately. Jeffrey Hughes, the superintendent at the time, who is now in Lansing, responded immediately. I have the letters. They were dated September 12th. I wish he could be here because he did such a wonderful job, actually. The letters that you are going to receive are those that he sent out to both parents and staff the very next day. Very few of our students have, in fact, experienced some attitudes, if you will, from other students, just because of being of Arabic background. This is why these letters had went out, to make sure that we were one big happy family and it was going to stay that way. Letters also went to the staff, because we had some staff members, I'm sure you heard of it, at Henry Ford Community College and some of the high schools in Dearborn, there were some students who experienced animosity from the adult teachers.

The other things I brought for you, and you may have already read them or seen them, are some articles that came out in the Detroit FreePress, that some of us feel may have added or fueled some of the aggravations. So we felt that these things may have been fueling some of the angers that were subsiding.

I really don't know what to tell you, aside from that, except for the fact that Dearborn is very proud about how it had been handled, how the children handled themselves and I would say ninety-eight percent of the staff. I will not say that some of the staff felt angry toward those of us who work in the system that are of Arab American descent, But, you couldn't feel bad about that because it was the pain that they were experiencing. Yet it was our duty to tell them the pain that we too were experiencing as Americans of Arabic descent. So it took a while, probably no different than it took us time to get them to understand us before all this, just the fact that we are of a different diverse background. Everybody has a background and we have learned to live with that and we have learned to grow and appreciate each other.

One more thing I will pass around is one sheet that we started to pass out. We did it both in Arabic and in English. It's a poem that was written actually years ago that we use in a committee that I sit on. It's called Diverse City, Diverse and then City, with a C. The League of Women Voters, Dearborn Heights began that committee. So we started to use this in some of our

workshops that we had to promote diversity and the beauty of it. So we went ahead and credited those who deserved the credit at the bottom and made sure that we had it typed out in Arabic so that the students in the high schools and middle schools were able to read it and live by it, hopefully.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do the schools have any assemblies or anything like that right after, to talk to the kids, or was it just kind of classroom --

MS. AMEN: We did one assembly per high school. Each school handled it on their own. They didn't do a whole school assembly but they brought down grades, yes. They did it on a continued basis for about two months prior to the Christmas holidays. That was just to make sure that over the Christmas holidays people weren't still fueling and were going to respond to their neighbors on the outside in a different manner. So, I can say they did that. The cabinet met, the cabinet being the highest administrators in the Dearborn Public Schools. We also had weekly meetings with the principals and representatives from each building, who met on a weekly basis to be able to report what kinds of things were happening within their building. They could sit there and judge whether or not it was the eldest group of kids or was it the youngest group of kids that we needed to focus on. It seemed pretty much in between. It was more the eighth and ninth grade kids that weren't able to -- so really it worked out in that way, but we nipped it right in the bud. I don't think it carried on more than two months where we really had to sit, communicate, have workshops, bringing in the adults and students. The students did a very good thing in all the high schools. They too created their own workshops to promote diversity and promote acceptance of all kinds.

And there is a group across Michigan called STAND that got involved. I think by seeing that the students got involved with pulling this diversity promotion together, it really -- what can I say -- quenched their thirst to try and go out there and do what it is that they should have been doing in the beginning. So we're proud. There were some incidents that happened, I would say at least two or three. I was supposed to have copies of those and I don't know if Imad may have brought them from ADC. As a community liaison, usually there are difficulties within the school

system that come on my desk. There were three incidents, I believe, went to Ahmed's desk first, where they immediately called ADC.

There were certain incidents that happened within the school building between an instructor and a student, where the parent called ADC immediately. That happened in some cases and actually ADC handled it quite well, where they took it directly to the top. They went to the source and took care of it from there. In two cases they asked for public apologies, which was done, and a teacher was getting suspended for three days for the action. So we handled it in that way to make sure that they --

MR. SALEH: Did you have any difficulties in terms of interscholastics, in sports with teams from outside the Dearborn area? Were there any problems?

MS. AMEN: I will say that that has happened in the past, regardless of 911. It may have accelerated, the attitudes may have accelerated after 911, but I will say that there were maybe two schools that we dealt with that kind of situation, one, for sure, I know being Monroe High. But that's always happened, so I can't say that it happened --

MR. SALEH: With 911?

MS. AMEN: Really, I can't say that but, yes, it was accelerated.

MS. HA AJLANI: What percentage of the Dearborn Public Schools have Middle Eastern descent children?

MS. AMEN: Out of 17,700 students, if not more, there are over 15,000 of those students that are of Middle Eastern descent.

THE CHAIRMAN: What was the incident for which the teacher was suspended?

MS. AMEN: I wish I had that copy. I was supposed to have those copies sent to me yesterday. I didn't receive them. I called while I was on the road, but they didn't have them readily available. I will still have them sent to you. I'm trying to remember what -- again, I know that one of them had to do with -- I just found out about these three days ago, believe it or not. I never had any idea, because they never came across my desk.

I did mention that one of them had to do with a student/teacher situation and that is not

including Henry Ford College, that I think you probably heard about, and from my understanding there were two incidents at Henry Ford College. I think one was set aside and the other one was handled, where he, I think, was suspended for the one semester.

The other two had to do with student against student, because the Dearborn Schools, I don't know if that applies to all schools, there's an absolutely no tolerance of any activity, fighting-wise, whether it's physical or verbal, they're suspended. It starts with ten days and five days and then to ten days and after that, it's expulsion. But in those cases, wherever it began, had it not began from Arab Americans, that's where Ahmed stepped in and asked for a public apology, because it happened post-911, to not allow that to happen because it will fester.

MS. HA AJLANI: Do you believe that given the statistics of the Dearborn School System and because there were so many children of Middle Eastern descent, that the school systems were more sensitive to the issue of Middle Eastern American descent? And it seems like from what I'm hearing, that the schools took actions, took initiatives to, as you put it, to get it off -- nip it in the bud or whatever. I'm wondering, maybe we can take some of this example and apply it in a bigger setting, because school systems such as Dearborn, where there are many Arab American children, kids have already been exposed to the Arab American culture and the school system is more sensitive to the issues facing the Arab American children. But couldn't we take this in a larger step and not only apply it to the state of Michigan but to across the country in general, and maybe take some sort of steps in nipping this type of backlash and violence, violent sentiments against Middle Eastern descent people and try and work things out from that perspective?

MS. AMEN: I totally agree and that goes in all corners. It doesn't have to be a Middle Eastern student. It could be any student of any other background other than those that were born and raised here.

That's why I bought the letters to show how Dr. Hughes immediately sent those letters out and the type of wording that he played with, in order for those that were reading it to be aware that we're here today, and tomorrow so we have to learn to live with one another. You may not like your Middle Eastern neighbor but he might be your child's boss ten years down the line

and you are going to have to like him because he's then your bread and butter. Not to say that all Middle Eastern people will be the boss, but just to give the example that you have to learn to work with those who are around you. You are from the same community, so we may as well learn to live with one another. I agree with you that these could be used nationally and other things could be utilized to communicate with staff and administrators. They may be administrators, and may have doctorates and may be well educated but not necessarily educated in diversity and different backgrounds. How often do they understand a child that's in the halls, why does he walk that way, why does she talk that way, why is he looking at the other child the way he does. And it may not be in anger, it could be in curiosity. So I agree, those kinds of things can be involved, because Dr. Hughes was sensitive to the issues at hand. Having been there twelve or thirteen years, he is aware of the Middle Eastern cultures.

The other thing that he did for us, when he first came to the Dearborn Public Schools, was he changed our holidays. As opposed to Christmas break, it then became winter break and these were problems with the board of education. It was hard for them to accept, because why is it a Christmas break. We understand it's a break, but it's only during Christmas time, but it is a Winter Break, and he was adamant about making sure he changed that because of his background, as well. Then, too, we have the Easter break, which is during Easter and he changed that to Spring Break. What he also did, and this could go across the board, as well, is we have our holidays, which is at the end of Ramadan, and because we have usually a three-day holiday, he tried to place into that same time frame another break. It could have been a winter break, could have been a semester break. But somehow, some way, he made sure he shut down for the days to give those kids their holiday first. Instead of Dearborn Public Schools losing money, because you have to have a certain percentage of students in the building, let's just shut down. And a lot of people took a lot of aggravation and hardship in dealing with that change.

So then we came back with all right, let's shut down for one week during Christmas, so we will save that other week, the second week, we will save that. Needless to say, the hoopla that took place, so he had to make sure that he got into the community and made sure they

understood we were going to do it this way and this is how it would be handled.

Before he left this year and went to Lansing, he made it very clear to the new students, whoever they were, that things would stay the same, that changes would not be made for the holidays, because of the large Arab American population. Although there may be about 15,000 students of Arab American descent, not all of them are Muslims. So there's a very large Christian Arab population, as well.

MS. HAMILTON-SMITH: You mentioned the reoccurring problems with the Monroe School District, in terms of their interaction. Do you know if there is anyone who has attempted to work with Monroe? I imagine it starts with the adults and filters down to the students?

MS. AMEN: I can't say I know of any that may have happened. I only know on the level of the football field and I say that seriously, because it then became the coaches who were trying to work with the young men, at least, because it's always the jocks that have control of how the other students may feel about the other.

Really, it came to the football field, that we had to work with our players and we felt that those kids who had the upper word, if you will, within the building –

MS. HAMILTON-SMITH: But this isn't just on the Dearborn side but on the Monroe side, as well?

MS. AMEN: No. I think, on both sides, I think the coaches tried to work together because they knew each other, and that was another plus.

MR. KOBRAK: Peter Kobrak. I wonder whether you have ever published an article in one of the magazines, the school magazines, how students responded to 911? I think it would be very interesting to have you do so, because we're going to have other incidents and it would be helpful for the schools to think about what you do.

MS. AMEN: It sounds good. We have on our own district level, we have done that in our school news in the Dearborn District School News, even in the Dearborn Press. I write for that as a neighborhood columnist. You can only do so many things in a neighborhood column. They edit what you put, so there have been other things in the Detroit Free Press, Detroit News. The same

way, I can't speak on that behalf, because I have never written to the News and the Free Press. I have only been associated with the Dearborn Press and Guide. I think in some of our area media, it has been. If you are talking school news on a Lansing basis, where it goes state wide, I think that could be handled. If you know what MABE, Michigan Association for Bilingual Education, and NABE, the National Association for Bilingual Education, they do, in both those conventions. They usually have one each year. We are able to take advantage of that time to give the majority of those that attend – we have Asian, Hispanic and the Middle Eastern majority, and they were able to communicate and work with one another as to how to handle it. It's just not a Middle Eastern thing and it doesn't have to be a 911 situation, it just has to be a situation that you look different than I do and take it from there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, very much.

MS. AMEN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does anybody have anything else they want to discuss?

(No questions were posed.)

(The meeting was adjourned.)
