

February 16, 2004

Senator Charles Grassley  
135 Hart Senate Bldg  
Washington, DC 20510-1501

Dear Senator Grassley:

As you know, I wrote to you in March 2002 and had several meetings with your staff between March 2002 and June 2002. In my letter of March 2002 I informed you of the extreme urgency of the issues that I had reported to the FBI; since these issues directly related to information regarding severe problems with the FBI's translation department that existed prior to 9/11, and still continue despite the disasters we suffered during the 9/11 attacks. In a nutshell, what I reported was that due to incompetence, poor management, intentional acts, and personal non-U.S. loyalties within the translation department; translations were being blocked, mistranslated, and delayed; and that since these translations include items related to 9/11 terrorist activities, the security of our country and our ability to discover and prevent another planned terrorist attack continues to be seriously compromised. Although I had first made this report to management with the FBI, including upper level management, no action was taken, and I contacted your office.

I came to your office and reported these significant problems in good faith, in my belief that the Senate Judiciary Committee was indeed an oversight body that would exercise its responsibility for oversight of the FBI, and therefore that my statements regarding these problems would be taken seriously and appropriate actions taken. Your office agreed with the severity of these problems, established confirmation by the FBI itself, and you stated in public your view of the severity of these issues; going so far as to state on "60 Minutes" that the FBI's translation department needed to be "turned upside down". You are correct; I agree; it does need to be turned upside down.

I also made a report to the Office of the Inspector General, Department of Justice, which initiated an investigation. Both the OIG and your staff assured me that the investigation would be expedited, and that I could expect a report within six months; it has been almost two years. I am again being assured that the investigation is almost completed and that the report is due out no later than the end of March. Especially because it has taken so long to complete the investigation and the report, my expectation is that the investigation was extremely thorough, and that the report should cover fully all the allegations that I have made.

During these past two years there has been no visible improvement within the translation department; those who are unqualified and/or incompetent are still there; those who are poor managers and/or who are responsible for poor management are still there; those with questionable loyalties are still there. This is two years during which we have been under

constant threat of terrorist attacks; when we are under ‘orange’ and ‘yellow’ alerts; when we are all cautioned to “be vigilant”; yet the FBI is not “vigilant” within its own departments. How can the FBI possibly help protect us, the citizens of the U.S., against terrorist attacks, when it cannot, or will not, even protect itself?

I sat in your office last week with a family member of a 9/11 victim, and listened as we were told that nothing more could be done. Is this really the case; that nothing more can be done? The FBI Lebanese translation supervisor, Mike Feghali, who forced slowdown of translations in order to support the need for a larger budget, as was reported on 60 Minutes and in other media, after two years is still in the translation department, and has in fact been promoted to head the Arabic language section; and nothing more can be done about it? One unqualified translator, Kevin Taskesen, who was sent to Guantanamo to translate detainees, as was reported on 60 Minutes, the Chicago Tribune, and other media, after two years is still in the language department; and nothing more can be done about it? Translators who are sympathetic to those who would attack the U.S., as has been reported in various news media, after two years are still in place in the translation department; and nothing more can be done about it? Targets of FBI investigations left the country within two months of the time I first reported Melek Can Dickerson to FBI management, as reported in the Chicago Tribune and other news media; and for two years nothing has been done about it, or about the security failures that allowed this to happen; and nothing more can be done about it? It is not a matter of needing to wait for two years for confirmation; the Judiciary Committee received confirmation of the validity of my allegations regarding these issues directly from the FBI over one and a half years ago.

I came to your office almost two years ago because of the national security implications of what I had witnessed as a contract linguist during my tenure in the FBI’s Washington Field Office language department. My initial contact was by letter on March 19, 2002, while still under contract in the translation department, in which I stated; “*After witnessing how this department performs and manages, could I confidently answer whether the September 11 attacks could have been prevented by the accurate and responsive translation of target lines and documents that were intercepted by the FBI? Could I confidently state that possible threats and plots could be detected, translated and reported to the authorities? Unfortunately, the answer to both questions would be a confident NO.*” That was my belief then, and is still my belief; and because I know what I have witnessed, I cannot simply ignore it. That is why I came to your office originally; that is why I have gone to the 911 Commission and given them a secured briefing; that is why I have continued to work with your office, and to bring others who witnessed what I witnessed; that is why I have and will continue to work in any way I can, with whomever I can, to bring these issues to public attention. It is my duty.

A warning in advance of the next terrorist attack may, and probably will, come in the form of a message or document that will have to be translated. That message may be given to the translation unit headed by Mike Feghali, who slowed down previous

translations; so it may never be translated in time. That message may go to Kevin Taskesen, or another unqualified translator; so it may never be translated correctly. That message may go to a sympathizer within the language department; so it may never be translated fully, if at all. That message may come to the attention of an agent of a foreign organization who works in the translation department, who may choose to block it; so it may never get translated. If then an attack occurs, which could have been prevented by acting on information in that message, then who is going to tell family members of the new terrorist attack victims that nothing more could have been done? There will be no excuse that we did not know, because we could have known; there will be no excuse that the FBI translation unit is under budgeted, or overworked; there will in fact be no excuse at all; and we will all have blood on our hands – because we knew, but did nothing. This is why when sitting in your office beside this family member and hearing that “nothing more can be done” I felt ashamed; ashamed that this is the best we can do for all the family members of the thousands of victims; ashamed that we aren’t doing more; that we aren’t even allowing serious investigation of what was wrong before 9/11; or correcting what we already know to be wrong.

I have always viewed you as a man of integrity; one of a few in public office that has the courage to speak loudly, clearly and publicly about issues that you deem important. These are extremely important issues of national security, and we need you, the country needs you, to speak out, to bring together other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to call for public hearings, to investigate what was and is wrong in the FBI’s translation department; and most importantly, not to rest until changes are made; so that we can attack these serious shortcomings in our nation’s security before it is we who are again attacked.

Sincerely yours,

Sibel D Edmonds

CC: Senator Patrick Leahy

CC: Congressman Frank Wolf

CC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States

CC: The Family Steering Committee