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Kerik: FBI hindered city's anthrax probe

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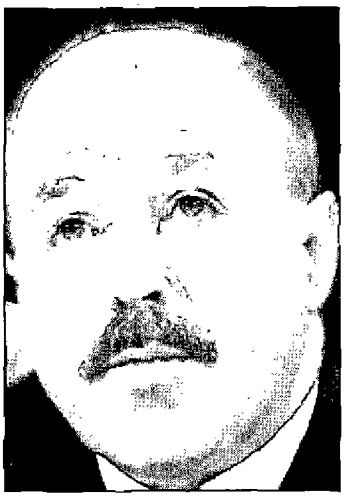
WASHINGTON — Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik yesterday accused the FBI of slowing New York's anthrax response by withholding for a week key information on the deadly virus.

Kerik, in testimony before Congress, blasted the FBI's decision earlier this fall to sit on the information that NBC anchor Tom Brokaw had gotten an anthrax-laced letter.

"We could have had a handle on it much earlier," said Kerik. "That letter was held for some time ... even more than a week. The FBI hadn't let us know."

Kerik complained that the FBI's mind-set is not to share information with local police departments — delaying the ability of the New York Police Department to respond to the crisis.

"Continuing to maintain walls between federal and state authorities with respect to the sharing of real-time information represents the worst kind of dysfunctional thinking in government and must be addressed as quickly as possible," Kerik said.



BERNARD KERIK
Says info was withheld.

Despite the earlier lack of sharing, Kerik yesterday had good words for recent cooperation between the city and federal investigative agencies, who are leading both the anthrax and Sept. 11 terrorist investigations.

Sen. Charles Schumer organized yesterday's Judiciary Committee hearing to draw attention to his proposed legislation that would encourage — but not force — the federal government to share a lot more with local police departments.

Even though it's backed by Democrats and Republicans, Schumer's bill probably is stuck in limbo this year, since Congress is aiming to go home this week or next.

After the hearing, Sen. Hillary Clinton met briefly with Kerik before he visited Republican House leaders. Clinton said she's lobbying Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to schedule a vote this year but is stymied by GOP reluctance in the House.

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-Brooklyn) is pushing the same bill in the House.

In an interview with reporters, Kerik said he didn't think the delay cost any New Yorkers their lives. The problem, say officials, is the federal-agency culture in which FBI agents often view local police as incompetent or untrustworthy.

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