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Kerik: FBI, Cops Must Cooperate

By Thomas Frank
WASHINGTON BUREAU

Washington — More than two months after the FBI failed to tell New York City police about an anthrax-laced letter found at NBC headquarters, Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik said information hoarding by law-enforcement agencies must stop.

Kerik told a congressional committee yesterday that maintaining "walls between federal and state authorities . . . represents the worst kind of dysfunctional thinking in government."

Kerik and other police called on Congress to pass a law that explicitly would allow federal agencies to give local police information from wiretaps, grand juries, intelligence reports and other sensitive sources. Current law, as well as "the culture within federal law enforcement," block information-sharing, said Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.). He introduced a bill after Kerik and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani complained the FBI did not tell city police about the anthrax letter sent to NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw.

Schumer said his bill would eliminate "any kind of legal excuse" not to share information. Co-sponsors are Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.).

Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley said after Sept. 11, a local utility called a federal tip line to report a suspicious truck parked outside one of its facilities. But city police, "which could have been there within minutes, never received this information."

Kerik said New York police did not learn about the NBC letter until a week after the FBI got a tip, and then only through the city's own investigation into another anthrax letter. The NBC letter, which was postmarked Sept. 16, infected Brokaw's assistant with the skin form of anthrax, but Kerik said after the hearing that FBI procedures did not jeopardize public health.

Kerik and other witnesses said federal officials have provided more information since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The FBI plans to create a new post to improve communication.

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