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Wagner Discusses 'Unfinished Business'

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Wagner Discusses 'Unfinished Business'

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After more than three decades of government service, Caryn Wagner has some unfinished business.

And that business made for quality classroom time April 8-9 as the recently retired Department of Homeland Security Undersecretary for Intelligence and Analysis visited the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Security as a guest lecturer.

In her retirement, Wagner is writing and lecturing about what has yet to be accomplished under the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act – what she calls unfinished business. Among those issues were the end of grant program largesse, the role of the Director of National Intelligence in homeland intelligence, and Congressional oversight of DHS.



“The one 9/11 Commission recommendation that has not been acted upon is streamlining Congressional oversight of homeland security,” Wagner said during an interview at Watkins Hall. “Better focused oversight at the Department level as opposed to the component level would help the Department get to the next level.”

Homeland security professionals continue working to meet mandates of the act, even as a decade of grant money aimed at implementing the law is rapidly diminishing. Wagner said the program was not optimal because more guidance was needed.

“A lot of money got spent,” she observed. “We still haven’t addressed all of the needs and the money is drying up.”

Wagner joined DHS Intelligence and Analysis in 2010 following a government career that included stints as budget director with the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, assistant deputy director of National Intelligence/Chief Financial Officer for the National Intelligence Program and Executive Director for Intelligence Community Affairs, as well as serving as senior faculty from 2008-2009 at the Intelligence and National Security Academy. She also served eight years as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army.

“She brings a unique perspective from the convergence of homeland security, homeland defense, law enforcement and intelligence,” CHDS faculty member Kathleen Kiernan said. “She possesses a whole of government approach which makes her the perfect to thought leader for our students.”

Upon joining DHS, Wagner emphasized information sharing as well as education while accentuating the importance of state and local partners, especially in the national network of fusion centers. DHS Intelligence and Analysis provides technical, intelligence and educational support to the fusion centers that are operated by state and local governments.

While the fusion centers are designed to convene varied levels of government together for information sharing and analysis, including the fire service profession remains challenging. Law enforcement agencies generally are the lead agencies in those operations. States decide how the centers are structured, but would do well to include their fire service counterparts.

“Fusion centers are our flagship idea,” Wagner said. “We can’t reach out to every sheriff’s department and fire

department, so we rely on fusion centers to disseminate information and bring in the right players. When they bring the fire service into the fusion centers, it works well.”

Even as budgets shrink, continued training and education for fusion center practitioners and managers will be critical to success.

“In a perfect world we would expand education,” she said. “That is an area where more is needed. I suspect we will look more to distance learning.”

As she settles into post-DHS life, Wagner is writing about her “unfinished business” concerning doctrine associated with information sharing as well as clarification of the role of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in the homeland and the role of intelligence involved in homeland security.

“The Department of Homeland Security is not going away,” Wagner said. “We need to structure it for success.”

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