

## **FBI HURT TERROR PROBE: CUSTOMS CHIEF**

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### **Body**

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A **PROBE** INTO suspected Al Qaeda fund-raising was blocked by the **FBI** in a petty turf war, a **customs chief** said last night.

Joe Webber, a Sept. 11 survivor and now **chief** of Immigration and **Customs** Enforcement in Houston, said **FBI chiefs** stood in the way of his **probe**. And he alleged they barred it because the information came from outside the bureau - despite President Bush's directive that law enforcement agencies must work together to beat terrorism.

Webber told "Dateline NBC," "My concern is that we have learned nothing from the events of Sept. 11."

Webber, who was based in the World Trade Center when he was **chief** of the New York office of U.S. **Customs**, was inside the building when it collapsed. He was rescued by two firefighters. He began his Houston investigation into the suspected terrorism fund-raising operation 2 1/2 years ago.

"There's clearly probable cause to believe that the target of the investigation was in communication with those involved in international terrorism, with those associated with Osama Bin Laden," he said.

He said a wiretap was needed to get more evidence, but that required approval from **FBI** headquarters in Washington.

His request sat on a desk for four months, he said, and eventually he asked for a direct meeting. "The answer was, 'We have too many people on vacation,' " he said. "I was shocked."

Eventually, friends in the **FBI** told him the delay was because the case was not generated by the **FBI**. "That's absolutely my impression," he said. "If one dollar found its way into the hands of a terrorist that impacted the life of a U.S. citizen or a soldier in Iraq . . . we lost."

An **FBI** statement said, "There is often healthy debate about the best approach, [but] it's never at the expense of public safety or national security."

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