

Nation

9/11 project financed privately by 7 nonprofits

By Guy Taylor
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The 9/11 Public Discourse Project, which criticized the government's counterterrorism preparedness yesterday, is financed by private donations from seven nonprofit groups.

The project was created as a 501(c)(3) organization last year by the original 10 members of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (known as the September 11 commission).

Government funding for the

commission expired shortly after the panel released its best-selling final report in July 2004.

A spokesman for the project said the private funding totaled about \$900,000, with none of the seven organizations donating more than \$200,000. The government's budget for the commission, which disbanded as an official organization in August 2004, had been \$15 million.

Operating since as the 9/11 Public Discourse Project, its members no longer have secu-

rity clearances or power to subpoena witnesses, and its goal, said spokesman Al Felzenberg, has been "to alert the public of the progress in the recommendations we made."

He added that the release of the report card was expected to be the group's final act.

Along with one unsolicited private donation of \$100 from a New Jersey woman, the project was financed by the America Prepared Campaign Inc., the Carnegie Corp. of New York, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Drexel Family Foundation,

the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and the Smith Richardson Foundation Inc.

"It's a cross section of foundations across the board," Mr. Felzenberg said. "They're all nonprofits, they're all grant makers, they all give to fund research or charities."

Some observers called it unusual that the project continued working without government funding. "We couldn't think of another example in which a publicly funded commission

has morphed into a privately funded venture like this," said Mary Boyle, spokeswoman for the government watchdog group Common Cause.

"On one hand, we feel like if there's work ... to be done that the government should be funding it. It shouldn't have to be privately funded," Miss Boyle said. "But at the same time, there's the advantage that when it is privately funded the commission may feel more free to be critical of the government."

Although the nonprofit funding appears to be bipartisan

and not politically tainted, she said, the commission's validity "depends on who's funding it."

"You wouldn't want the Saudi government funding it," Ms. Boyle said.

Mr. Felzenberg said that in continuing the commission without government money, "there was a decision made not to take money from corporations or private individuals or even political organizations that may have a stake in [what] we advocated or perhaps in stopping something we didn't advocate."