

## Remarks by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff at the 2008 End of the Year Address



Release Date: December 18, 2008

Washington, D.C.  
Georgetown University

**Secretary Chertoff:** Well, I want to thank Gary Shiffman for that kind introduction. I also want to thank him for his service for several years at Customs and Border Protection where he was a valued adviser, not just to the commissioner, two successive commissioners, but to me when I was a new secretary of the department, and I continue to look to Gary's friendship and counsel on a whole wide range of issues.

Obviously, I'm violating the rule about talking in the library.

So I'm a little nervous. It's a beautiful library. It's a beautiful opportunity and a beautiful setting to have what I try to do every year, which is a review of the previous year, both looking backward and setting forth priorities for the year to come.

This year, or this afternoon rather -- this morning I should say -- I'm going to do something a little bit different. I'm going to look back over the past five years, because I think it's an opportunity for me to reflect upon my experience and my tenure and the department and also the department's entire existence, which has, as you know, been about five-and-a-half years. We had our fifth year anniversary in March of 2008.

And I think, in particular, there are a few areas I want to focus on that, looking back, capture the early legacy of the department and reflect a very substantial return on investments the American public made when they set up the department, and ultimately invested literally billions of dollars and put hundreds of thousands of people into the department's framework.

But before I talk about the department, specifically I want to stand back and look at the entire history of this period since September 11th from the standpoint of the entire administration.

I had the opportunity to serve this president in two roles, both of which were intimately involved with terrorism. The first was my appointment as Chief of the Criminal Division in June of 2001, before, obviously, we had the attack, which put me in a position to be literally an eyewitness at what I would call not physical Ground Zero, but maybe governmental Ground Zero, to the attacks themselves and to what happened afterwards.

And of course I've then had the privilege of serving the president for the last four years as head of this department.

And although I'm always reluctant to crow about an accomplishment at this point because we obviously are always concerned about what happens tomorrow and the next day, I do think with a, you know, kind of traditional touching of wood, I would have to echo what Gary said earlier, that no one would have predicted in the dark days immediately following September 11th when the smoke was still emanating from the smoldering fires underneath the World Trade Center, no one would have predicted that there would have been no successful attack on American soil in the following seven years.

And I don't think that's an accident. I don't know many people who do. I think it's actually a direct result of policies that this president launched, literally, in the minutes after September 11th and has carried through on as we speak today.

It's well known that the president told the Attorney General, John Ashcroft, several days after 9/11, "Don't let this happen again." And I think this was, in many ways, the touchstone of the president's entire effort with respect to security: Don't let it happen again.

I also believe that not letting it happen again is the single most important obligation that an American president owes the American people, or any leader owes the people of that leader's country.

I was in Paris yesterday signing an agreement with the French Ministry of Defense, and in the ceremonial

conference room where the signing took place is a quotation I believe from Charles de Gaulle, which translated from the French is as follows: "Security is the reason for the existence -- is the principal reason for the existence of the state."

Condition number one, the foundation of government, is to protect people, and I think that's an important perspective to have as we look back on the president's activities over the last seven years, and as we reflect upon what's to come in future administrations.

Among the things this president did to protect this country was reorganize and restructure the intelligence community, to unify it, taking the fight to the enemy, killing and capturing senior leaders of al-Qaeda in other parts of the world, thereby degrading their ability to plan and execute plots; enacting laws that would make it easier for us to protect the country and get early warning in a 21st century technology age; creating the department, which I'm privileged to lead; and also removing threats and platforms in Iraq and Afghanistan, which could have been launching pads for further attacks.

And we know in Afghanistan we found laboratories where al-Qaeda was experimenting, trying to determine whether they could create biological or chemical weapons.

All of these things taken together have made this country much safer, and I think it's, for me, my participation in this effort to protect the American people is the most important job and challenge I've ever undertaken in my life, and I've been privileged to do so under the leadership of a president who has been unwavering in his commitment to live up to that statement he said after 9/11: Don't let this happen again.

Now let me get a little bit more specific and look at this from the framework of this department and homeland security, particularly, what do we have ahead of us, and what have we got behind us?

First let me observe that we are obviously in a transition, and that means we are about to pass the baton to a new group of people who will lead this country over the next four years.

The threat of terrorism and the threat of extremist ideologies has not abated, and this was vividly underscored last month in Mumbai, where we saw a skillful, deadly attack particularly targeted upon a financial center in India, and with particular cruelty directed at Americans, British citizens who happened to be there, and of course, Jewish visitors who were in some of the locations in Mumbai. And this reminds us that this threat has not evaporated, and we can't turn the page on it.

There's a lot of work ahead of us in the next few weeks to complete what I think will be regarded as the most dedicated and effective transition that we've had in the country's history; one in which both the incoming team and the outgoing team have worked together very closely to make sure that we put any partisanship aside and make sure that we are all as prepared as we possibly can be to protect this country not only between now and Inauguration Day, but for the months and even years to follow.

The fact is that even as we speak, and through the days leading up to President-elect Obama's inauguration, and then for the months afterwards, we will have to be prepared 24 hours a day, seven days a week to deal with both what we can foresee and what's unexpected.

But having said that we have a lot ahead of us, I do think it's true that past is prologue. And to understand what we must do, we must understand from where we've come. So to appreciate what the journey has been, let's go back to the autumn of 2001 and reflect upon what we faced.

I was of course brand new as head of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice. Bob Mueller was literally days on the job prior to 9/11, and we were taking over the reins of government after, of course, another significant transition.

At that time there was most notably a huge division between the intelligence-gathering function of the government and the law enforcement function. As head of the Criminal Division, for example, I was not permitted to know what was in the files of the FBI that had been gathered based on FISA-generated intelligence. That was forbidden to me. It was forbidden territory to me.

And I remember on September 11th, I was probably, other than Bob Mueller, the first senior Justice Department official at the Strategic Operations Center at the FBI on the fifth floor, and as we tried to put together who the hijackers were and what the plan was, I remember recognizing how little we knew about what we were facing.

And part of that was a reflection of my own situation, having been deliberately kept in the dark by the law, which

forbade anybody on the intelligence side of the house to tell me anything they knew about terrorism.

It could not come over to me until we had reached a point that a case was ready to be prosecuted, and only then could I receive it and the intelligence gathering would be shut down.

I spent a moment on this because it's striking that we lived deliberately having put ourselves in the dark. And that reflection of those early hours, that there was much that we didn't know that we could have known I think has been part of what has animated me over the years I've worked on this.

I remember when the FISA Court finally allowed us a couple of days after 9/11 to look at the intelligence files and we saw some of the stuff that was in there, I mean, for example, Moussaoui, Zacarias Moussaoui, who is now convicted of having been involved in the conspiracy to attack the United States, I remember reading for the first time about what had been discovered on the intelligence side and how that had not been shared with the law enforcement side, and saying to myself on the spot, this is -- I hate to use the word, but in a way it's dynamite. It's unbelievable we couldn't know that.

And, again, it's so easy to lapse back and say, what has happened since 9/11 was really unnecessary. We can go back to September 10th. I was there on September 10th. I was there on September 11th. I can tell you, I would not wish on anybody who has the responsibility to protect the American people and to look into the eyes of people who have lost loved ones in terrorist attacks, as I have done, I would not wish on them having to put a blindfold back on so they could not adequately assure the public and themselves that everything possible was being done to protect America.

Now let me just remind everybody that 9/11 was followed by a couple of other very stressful things in the United States. The anthrax mailings began within a matter of months, as did the sniper who terrorized, not in a political way, but still in an emotional way, the Washington metropolitan area.

And I think that was a period of time in the fall of 2001 that Americans were as unsure and anxious as they had been during my lifetime, even including in the darkest days of the Cold War. I mean, I was just a little kid during the Cuban missile crisis, and maybe that was comparable, but it lasted only for a matter of days. We were talking about weeks and months of potentially paralytic fear and anxiety in this country.

And what was necessary was decisive action to send a clear message to our fellow citizens that attacks against our nation would not be tolerated.

I want to come back to those days. You know, the president standing on the rubble of 9/11, the president telling people that we were going to take vigorous action overseas and taking that action in Afghanistan within a very short period of time.

What we did here in the United States to begin to track down people who were part of the network that was -- or potentially part of the network that led to 9/11 -- all of this vigorous activity was not only important to prevent an attack, but also to reassure the American public that nothing was left undone within the law that could be done to protect them.

And I will tell you, if you look at the whole history of terrorism and other kinds of catastrophic attacks, or even natural disasters that have befallen people anywhere in the world, if there's any lesson I've learned in the last eight years, it's swift, strong and unequivocal and unhesitating action is the absolute first requirement of reassuring the public and giving them the confidence to continue to live their daily lives, and there's nothing more important than that.

What's noteworthy as we get into the actual strategy that developed during that period was how comprehensive the approach that was developed by the president and by leaders of Congress, how comprehensive that approach was, because there was a recognition that this would be not just a matter of a single reaction or a series of reactions, but an absolute retooling of the government, in many ways heeding the advice of a number of presidential and other commissions that had been talking about the need to upgrade, literally for years, prior to September 11th.

We analyzed what the vulnerabilities were and what the lessons were that we had learned from September 11th. We looked, for the first time, perhaps, very directly and honestly into the eyes of the worst possible threats we might face, without blinking, so that we understood what it is that we had to be prepared to address in order to protect this country, going down the line months and even years into the future.

Working in uncharted territory, people all across the government, in the legislative branch, in the executive branch, in the military, pulled together a strategy that was designed to address the totality of what we faced and what we might face going into the future.

So we passed the Patriot Act almost over -- almost unanimously -- there was overwhelming support for the Patriot Act in 2001. And by the way, for those who believe it was passed in the dead of night, I was there. We spent a lot of days working with members of Congress on this thing. This was not a midnight type of deal you sometimes see coming out of Congress. This was a well thought out and very, very thoroughly discussed package of measures.

We took major steps to track down terrorist finance and to make sure that we could share information among the intelligence and law enforcement agencies so we never again had that sense of being blindfolded.

The president issued a series of homeland security presidential directives, standing up a Homeland Security Council, directing that we take concrete steps to keep dangerous people out of the country, to make sure we could manage incidents in an effective way, and a whole host of other things designed to upgrade us into the 21st century.

The FBI completely overhauled itself. Bob Mueller changed the culture of the department and put counterterrorism and analysis very much at the center of what the FBI does. And the old legacy of stovepiping between CIA, FBI, Department of Justice and then ultimately our department, that was driven -- that demon was driven out by concerted leadership at the very top of all the departments.

In 2004 the president established the National Counterterrorism Center so that we could have integration and analysis of all intelligence drawn from all parts of the United States government, and then of course Congress passed and the president signed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Protection Act which created the Office of Director of National Intelligence.

Now there were many, many other things that we done, but of course for my purposes, it turned out that one of the most important was the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. The vision of this, which was first recommended by a commission years earlier, was the recognition that to protect our perimeter, we needed not to have one part of the job done at the Treasury Department, one part of the job done at the Justice Department and one part of the job done at the Transportation Department. We needed to bring all of this together. We needed to get together the Coast Guard, the TSA, the customs function and the immigration function so that we could look holistically at air, sea and land, people and things, and ask how do we protect the country against danger, either walking on two legs or coming maybe in a cargo container.

And it was the integration of that in the Department of Homeland Security, as well as the recognition that we needed to plan, to prevent, protect and respond that was responsible for the strategy and the architecture of the department, which was stood up in March of 2003.

The purpose was not simply to create a new department. It was to have one place where the overarching mission would be protect all of our air, sea and land against people coming in to do dangerous things, and then work to protect the internal infrastructure, something that had never been done before, by analyzing and managing the risk in partnership with the private sector.

This was a very big chore, and a very big task and a very big challenge, setting this up. As the first secretary, Tom Ridge said, quote, "One of the greatest challenges of our first year was we had to not only get the department up and running operationally, meaning consolidate systems, integrate servers and get a stapler on every desk; but foremost, we had to strengthen and extent our nation's protective measures, particularly at our airports, seaports and borders."

That statement adequately -- accurately captures the scope of the work that was undertaken by the initial plank owners, the founders of this department, and the men and women who came to the department from our legacy agencies.

So I want to thank those people who were here at the creation for their special dedication and the special energy they brought to standing up the department. In particular, I want to single out Secretary Ridge and his leadership team, and I know Gary was one of the early people here, who really took on the enormous task of building where there was nothing, and did so in a way that allowed me, when I took the helm, to have a firm foundation on which to continue to frame the walls and the roof and the other major structures that make up this department.

The challenge of this department is enormous, and let me put it in some kind of context here. On an average

single day, this department screens more than two million air travelers. We inspect more than 300,000 cars crossing the border. We check 70,000 shipping containers for dangerous materials at our ports, and we work with the private sector to secure thousands of pieces of critical infrastructure, whether they be bridges and dams or chemical plants and cyber systems.

Every day we rescue hundreds of people in danger or distress, and we naturalize more than 3,200 new American citizens and conduct 135,000 national background -- national security background checks during the course of a year.

We manage these and other risks every day. That's not to say that we promise to protect every single person from every danger at every moment. That's not possible. We don't promise to eliminate all risk. That's not possible. And even if it were possible, and I said this four years ago, we would not want to pay the price in our freedom and our prosperity in order to get that level of zero risk.

But what we can do and what we do do is provide risk-based protection against the most consequential threats while striving to minimize disruption and inconvenience. And in order to focus this very, very large task, I like to think about what we do in five major pillars, the pillars of homeland security.

The first is to continue to protect our nation from dangerous people. The second is to continue to protect our nation from dangerous things. The third is to continue to strengthen both the protection and the resiliency of our critical infrastructure. The fourth is to be able to respond in a nimble and effective way if something bad does happen, and also to build a culture of preparedness so that everybody in the country can play their role in preparing to minimize the damage if Mother Nature or man carries out an act of destruction against our country. And, finally, the fifth pillar is the strengthening of operations and management so we can continue to fulfill the promise of the department as it was originally conceived by those who framed it.

Just to let you know how we pursue these goals, we have established 61 specific initiators, or programs, with metrics and benchmarks as a disciplined way of managing ourselves to achieving each of these overall strategic objectives. This approach has kept us on track. It's kept us focused. And it has actually yielded real concrete results in the day to day operations of this department.

Let me give you some sense of some of the milestones that we have reached in the slightly more than five years of the department's existence using the strategic management strategy that I've outlined.

Well, first of all, let's talk about how we've enhanced security. We've completely overhauled our aviation security system. Remember, it was the failure of security on that system that not only led to 9/11, but led to the Lockerbie terrorist bombings and a whole host of other hijackings and bombings that we've seen prior to 9/11.

And today, unlike on September 10, 2001, there were more than 20 layers of security that protect air travelers, from hardened cockpit doors and federal air marshals to 100 percent screening of passengers and their bags.

At our borders where we previously had about 11 miles of fence that had been built during a 10-year period from 1993 to 2003, we now have over 500 miles of fence, protecting not only our country, but our Border Patrol that puts themselves at risk on the border.

We have added new technology at the border. We have doubled the Border Patrol from what it was when this president took office, and through the federal law enforcement training center we have continued to maintain a high professional standard in our training and preparation for our agents.

I, myself, have been to the southern border many, many times over the last four years. I've even welded some of the border fence. I've ridden horse patrol with the Border Patrol. I've stood there while the people go through the ports of entry, and I have to tell you the fine work of the people who protect our borders is transforming what we are doing in terms of border security.

I have heard from people who used to live in areas where they were routinely plagued by criminality or, at a minimum, just property destruction when smugglers move through with impunity. And these people now say that has stopped. They now can live in peace and quiet, and that's thanks to the kinds of effort we put at the border.

At the interior, we've done dramatic things to focus on the issue of illegal migration in this country. It's no surprise that we were disappointed and the president was disappointed. We couldn't get comprehensive immigration reform, which I think was the most balanced approach to border security, and also what we need economically and from a humanitarian standpoint.

But, given that Congress has not passed that, the most important thing we can do is enforce the law the way it has been written; and, therefore, we've arrested record numbers of illegal aliens, including more than 11,000 gang members and 34,000 fugitives, and we've deported almost 350,000 illegal aliens in the past year. That is a record.

Prior to September 11th, we hardly scanned any cargo at all coming into our seaports, but today at our seaports, we scan virtually 100 percent of incoming containers for radiation to make sure that a weapon of mass destruction -- a nuclear weapon of mass destruction -- doesn't come into the United States through the global supply chain.

In addition, we have stationed our inspectors overseas to screen cargo before it leaves foreign ports, and we're enhancing our ability to identify and track maritime threats all the time using intelligent space targeting.

We've also vastly improved our coordination and information sharing with our partners at every level: state and local officials, private sector companies and our international counterparts, with whom we have increasingly close cooperation and with whom we have signed a number of very significant information sharing agreements.

One specific example is the creation of fusion centers all across the country that allow state and locals to fuse the information they collect that may have intelligence value so that they can identify threats and so that we can share in that information and connect the dots with what we see at the federal level.

Another thing that we have done is we've moved swiftly to strengthen the security of our identification documents. We now require passports to fly into the United States from anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, and we are moving and we will be ready this June to require passports or comparable secure documents to enter by land borders.

This plugs a major gap that the 9/11 Commission identified when it conducted its review of security after the September 11th attacks. And we not only rely upon documents and identification papers, but we also look to biometrics.

Through US VISIT we record the fingerprints of all non-American and non-Canadian visitors entering our country, and we check those prints in real time against terrorist and criminal watch lists while maintaining rigorous privacy protections. We didn't do that prior to September 11th.

We've also implemented new standards for secure driver's licenses across the United States to prevent the use of fraudulent or stolen documents. And the Secret Service, which of course is widely known for its protective activities, has actually played a leading role in combating identity theft, bringing down the biggest international scheme involving identity theft in history earlier this year, when a number of people were arrested who were responsible for the theft of more than 40 million credit card numbers.

To protect chemical plants, we now require high risk chemical facilities to develop security plans and harden their assets, and we've implemented new regulations to protect chemical shipments traveling by rail.

We've now deployed an early warning biological surveillance system to 30 major metropolitan areas and we continue to work with our Science & Technology branch to identify new technologies that will make this detection ability quicker and even more efficient and more widely capable of being dispersed than what we now have.

Finally, the president has launched and given us a major responsibility in carrying through the Comprehensive National Cybersecurity Initiative, which is significantly reducing entry points into government domains and working to upgrade our ability to detect and, ultimately, to block malicious attacks coming over the internet that threaten either to steal our information or to disrupt what we do. And this, I think, is the last major vulnerability that we are on our way to plugging.

Finally, recognizing that we can't stop everything bad, we have strengthened FEMA, built new capabilities to track commodities, improved emergency communications, and most important, for the first time developed a planning capability with civilian agencies and the DoD that gives us the ability to prepare, train for, exercise against and execute plans for major disasters in a way that simply was not the case prior to 2001.

And I can give you a laundry list of other accomplishments, but I think one way to kind of sum it up is to talk about three major metrics, which in many ways I think are perhaps the poster legacy of the first five years of this department's existence. And these are metrics not based on what we've done, but what we've achieved.

The first of these is reversing the flow of illegal immigration. The second is building a 21st century FEMA; and the third is preventing or disrupting terrorist attacks aimed at the United States itself. And I'd like to just briefly talk

about each of these three points.

Two years ago I don't think people had any belief that it would be possible within the remainder of this administration to stop, let alone begin to reverse, the tide of illegal immigration. But we have done that.

Thanks to measures we've taken at the border and our record-breaking apprehensions in the interior, for the first time we see a shift in illegal immigration.

Again, to remind you, 18,000-plus border patrol agents now sworn in, 500-plus miles of fence and more being built every day; and the result of this through every measure is that less people are coming across the border and less people are trying to sneak in.

Our border apprehensions are down 40 percent since Fiscal Year 2005, and particularly in those areas which are high traffic areas we've seen a collapse in the number of people who come across the border illegally.

For the first time since 2001, the Pew Hispanic Center said at a minimum there was no net increase in illegal immigration, and quite likely there was a net decrease in illegal immigration.

Some of this, no doubt, is due to the economy, but Pew also found that for the first time in many years, illegal immigration has dropped below legal immigration, which is a measure of the fact that it's not just the economy, but it's tough enforcement.

This is also supported by anecdotes, by what we hear from people who are interviewed in the media, who have said that they are not going to come back anymore because of border enforcement.

It's supported by what we see on the south side of the border, where in a place like Sasabe where there was a booming economy in providing people who are crossing the border with water bottles and backpacks and other kinds of comfort items. That's collapsed. Those businesses have dried up because people aren't crossing the border in that area anymore because of what we've done with the tactical infrastructure and the Border Patrol. And that is evidence you can see with your own eyes.

I know some people don't like to believe we're accomplishing this, but I think the American people not only insist upon it, I think it is the only thing that will ever pave the way for Congress to say to the American people, okay, we have proven that we are dedicated to protecting you. Now we want to talk about a more comprehensive resolution of this problem.

The second major area is the dramatic reformation of FEMA and our entire government-wide ability to respond to disasters and catastrophes.

You will recall, or you won't recall, that about a month before Katrina I gave a speech and I talked about what we had discovered in our Second Stage Review. And one of the things that surprised me was the lack of plan -- actual, concrete planning -- for civilian emergencies that existed in a civilian domain. And, of course, this was underscored by what happened a month later in Hurricane Katrina.

We spent an enormous amount of effort, not only at this department, but across the government, changing that approach and building an integrated planning system and the ability to work together to draw up specific preparations for dealing with foreseeable catastrophes and attacks that meant both increased capabilities and increased ability to integrate all of our response, whether it be military or civilian.

Among other things, we've completed a National Response Framework. We've modernized our logistics management, and perhaps something that I think is most important is we've gotten the Department of Defense very closely aligned with us at every level so that we really are joined at the hip in a way that I think people would not have believed possible when I came in in 2005.

And I want to pay special thanks to the leadership of the Department of Defense because whether it was Admiral Keating or General Renuart or the civilian leadership, they have simply stepped up and said whatever we could do to work with you we are here to do it. And they deserve an awful lot of applause.

We had a major stress test of this new capability in late 2007 and 2008. We had unprecedented California wildfires. We had historic Midwest floods. We had the worst tornado season in recorded history, and finally we had back-to-back hurricanes in the Gulf; Gustav and Ike. And, I might say an evacuation with Hurricane Gustav that was night and day compared to what we saw in Hurricane Katrina.

The fact is that whether faced with fires, floods, tornadoes, or hurricanes, we think we have demonstrated to the American people that FEMA has been very substantially and successfully retooled, and the nation's emergency management system has been vastly improved.

And, by the way, I believe that's a direct result of the fact that it had not been FEMA operating by itself, but FEMA integrated in the department where you have the Coast Guard. You have air assets and Customs and Border Protection. You even have the TSA able, literally on a day's notice, to put screeners into distribution centers to give food out to people who need food, something that could not be done if FEMA was isolated and standing on its own.

But then let me come to the third, and maybe the area that the American public thinks of first when they think of homeland security, which is the success of our counter-terrorism strategy. And, as I've said, this is not merely a work of Homeland Security, but it is a work of everybody in government at all levels, and also an enormous amount of cooperation from just the general public.

To put in perspective what we have faced, I want to make it clear: it's not that we haven't been attacked since 9/11. It's that we haven't been successfully attacked. There have been efforts to attack us.

Let's look back to the summer of 2006 in the airline plot that originated in London, which, had it succeeded would have resulted in detonating liquid explosives on multiple airliners coming to North America from Britain with literally thousands of deaths and perhaps a crippling blow to the aviation system.

And there are currently pending in our United States courts two cases involving allegations of attacks, terror attacks, here in the United States: One, the allegation of a terrorist attack being planned on Fort Dix; another involving allegations of an attack planned at JFK Airport, and of course, there are cases like the Lackawanna Six, or the cases up in the Northwest part of the United States where people were arrested and convicted for material support to terrorism.

All of the this work done at the Department of Justice, but also with the full support of the U.S. government.

These are the kinds of examples of plots that have been prevented. And when you look at what's gone on everywhere else in the world, successful attacks in Madrid, successful attacks in London, newly successful attack in Glasgow, attacks in Mumbai, in Islamabad, in Bali. I could go on and on.

It's not astonishing to reflect, but it is frightening to reflect, that since September 11th, excluding Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorists have killed more than 20,000 men and women and wounded more than 43,000 around the world.

Let me say that again. Since 9-11, excluding Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorists have killed more than 20,000 men and women and wounded more than 43,000 around the world. That is a stunning figure.

Not one of these deaths and not one of these woundings occurred in the United States after September 11th. And that is also a stunning figure.

That's a testament to the president's leadership, to the work of every one of my colleagues, almost 220,000 men and women in this department, and to the fine work of everybody else who stands watch for this country at every level of government.

So I -- therefore, I really have to conclude by giving my personal thanks, not only as secretary, but as a citizen and as a father, to the people of this department and the people of this government, and of state and local government, and all of our partners for what they have done to keep us as safe as we have been over the last seven and a half years.

And that, in the end, these three major metrics, and perhaps most important what I said was the number one reason, or maybe it was Charles de Gaulle said it was the number one reason for the existence of the state. I think that's a lot to reflect upon with gratitude, as this administration passes into history and a new one comes on board.

Let me conclude by just making a couple of other brief points. One of the great joys of this job was obviously the opportunity to deal with the president, cabinet, colleagues around the world; but in many ways the greatest pleasure was dealing with the individual men and women who make up this department.

Some of the memories, as I reflect back that I carry most dearly are things like riding horseback patrol with the

Border Patrol down in Arizona, or getting on a motor life boat, in Motor Life Boat school, getting on a motor boat and riding with the people who were training to be rescue swimmers for the Coast Guard; sleeping on a cot in Baton Rouge during Gustav with the people of the Joint Field Office; and also over-nighting on Coast Guard ice-breaking cutter up in the Arctic on a lonely overnight over the course of the summer.

The opportunity to meet and talk to and spend some time with the outstanding people who work in this department on a personal level has been the most rewarding thing I have done in the last four years, and it's something I'm going to tell my successor will be a special treat that she will have in store for her.

So for all those who hosted me, ate meals with me, rode with me -- I didn't get seasick, but got tossed around a little bit with me -- thank you for sharing your experiences with me and letting me absorb them and incorporate them into what I've tried to bring this department.

Finally, one word of advice to the country. It's easy for the gratitude, for the freedom, and the safety we've enjoyed over the last seven and a half years to be taken for granted. We take a lot of things for granted in our society. But history has shown us that when you begin to take these things for granted, you often lose them.

I don't think we need to live in a draconian society or a police state in order to protect ourselves. But I do think we need to continue to resolve to carry on what we have put into place. Not that it's perfect, not that it can't be adjusted here or there, not that it can't be criticized or debated; but if you look at the totality of the architecture that's been built, I don't think you can, in fairness, describe it as anything other than a success.

And it will remain successful as long as the public continues to support the people who fulfill their responsibility in the next administration as they continue to carry out their most important missions.

I have perfect confidence in the dedication of my successor, and the new administration. I believe they are as dedicated as we to protecting Americans, and I believe they will want to carry on and discharge its most important obligation with as much vigor as we did.

I think what we need to do as the public is to support that effort, and that is what I intend to do as a private citizen.

And I hope and I pray that when my successor looks back on, let's say two or four years in office, she's able to say, as I have been able to say, we have not experienced another successful attack on American soil.

If she can say that, that's going to be not only her triumph and the triumph of the new administration, but also something in which all of us who have stood up this department can take a quiet and very deep pride.

So I want to thank the members of the department, and everybody else I've been privileged to work with, and I want to wish you all not only a Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year, and every other happy holiday of the season, but God's blessings, as we continue to do the most important work for the American people, which is keeping us safe.

Thank you.

**Moderator:** The Secretary's agreed to take a couple of questions before he has to move on so over to you. Over here on the end.

**Question:** I'm Rosemary Jenks with NumbersUSA. You mentioned that all travelers who are non-Canadian and non-American are being screened through US-VISIT.

**Secretary Chertoff:** Right.

**Question:** And that's at land ports, airports, and sea ports?

**Secretary Chertoff:** That's right.

**Question:** That shocks me because just a few months ago it was, like, two percent at land borders.

**Secretary Chertoff:** Well, we got a lot -- because most of the traffic at land borders is Americans and Canadians in the northern borders.

**Question:** And Mexicans.

**Secretary Chertoff:** Well, Mexicans do have -- Mexicans we have fingerprints for so we have the boarder

crossing cards.

**Question:** Okay, thank you.

**Question:** Phil Riley from the American Legion. General McCaffrey indicated recently that 40,000 plus border patrol are needed. Could you tell us what you really think the real requirement is?

**Secretary Chertoff:** Well, I think what we've planned for is 20,000. We've got about a little over 18,000 now and there's money in the budget for 20,000. I think once we reach 20,000 the Border Patrol is going to have to access with the right lay down of tactical infrastructure, meaning fencing, and technology, whether that's enough or whether they need more. And I think that's going to be part of the exercise they have to engage in as they do, kind of, a four-year plan out there. But I think that, and I certainly wouldn't exclude the possibility of -- well, I don't know that 40,000 has a particular appeal to me, but I certainly think what we've got now is very effective and I'm looking forward to the additional 2,000 come on next year.

**Question:** Hello, this is Jennifer Lee from China Press. I have problem for the immigration application. Is there any difference or change for the transition team or the new administration? Thank you.

**Secretary Chertoff:** Well, I can't speak for what the new administration is going to do on immigration applications. What I can say is that we have dramatically reduced the backlog, which had been persistent for a long period of time, in background checks and we were able this past year to get more new citizens naturalized by a significant margin than in prior years, and that's notwithstanding an overwhelming flow, an unprecedented flow, of applications that came in over the last year. So that's -- a lot of progress has been made, but that new administration has to speak for itself.

**Moderator:** Mr. Secretary, thank you for your comments today. Thank you for your years of government service and as you transition on we wish you best and Godspeed. Thank you.

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This page was last reviewed/modified on December 18, 2008.