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Remarks by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff at Johns Hopkins University

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Release Date: December 3, 2008

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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Washington, D.C.

Secretary Chertoff: Well, thank you, Steven, for that kind introduction. I also want to thank Dr. Roth, Associate Director, and all of you for coming out to attend my remarks today. It's great to be here at Johns Hopkins and particularly here in Washington as opposed to in Baltimore.

Secretary Chertoff: Not that Baltimore is bad, just be a longer drive than what I had to do to come here.

I hope you all had a Happy Thanksgiving and I hope you're all looking forward to a Happy Holiday Season later this year.

Now, from my standpoint, as I look forward to the next year, of course a new Administration is taking office. One thing that means for me is that I will not have to live through another hurricane season. I'm used to spending the last four years over the summer, particularly in August when everybody else is kind of kicking back and thinking about how to best enjoy the summer holidays, I'm used to carefully watching the weather reports to see if a cyclone is forming somewhere in the Atlantic and the Caribbean which looks like it's going to spoil my holiday and, of course, this past year, as is not uncommon, I spent much of my time during the summer down in the Gulf dealing with the anticipation of the hurricane and the aftermath of the hurricane.

But before I get into the meat of my speech, I want to make a couple of remarks on some related but distinct topics. First, I want to encourage all of you who are not already working at the Department of Homeland Security, and I know some of you are, to consider the department as a potential future career choice.

If you are motivated to help other people, if you're motivated to defend the country, we have a very wide range of options, whether it's working for Transportation Security, Customs and Border Protection, Science and Technology. I think if you look at what we do, almost any interest, whether it's an analytic interest or an operational interest, can find a place at the Department of Homeland Security and a very meaningful mission, and as you listen to my remarks today, I think you'll find perhaps some glimpse of what it is that we do.

Second, I'd like to take the opportunity to, before I get into the core of this speech, just look back a little bit and reflect on the last eight years and the presidency that is about to come to an end in January 20th. I've been privileged to serve this president for six out of the past eight years, first for two years as head of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice where we dealt with 9/11 on September 11th and during the months afterwards, and then during my four years as Secretary of Homeland Security. The only period in the last eight years I didn't serve in the Administration was my two years as a federal judge.

I have to say that looking back on these eight years, as Director Davis said, it is quite remarkable that we haven't been attacked. Now, I always touch wood, this is not really wood, it's laminate but maybe that's wood, because we're not totally at the end yet, but I think we've gone far enough to say that, looking back on the record, it speaks volumes.

Now, when I say we haven't been attacked, I should amend that. We haven't been successfully attacked. We have been attacked. There have been efforts made to attack this country, whether it was the Shoe Bomber in December of 2001 or the August 2006 airline plot directed at airline flights from Britain to the United States or some of the other plots that you read about in the newspaper that are currently the subject of various trials, but the fact is none of these have been successful, and I don't think that's an accident. I think it is a direct result of policies that this president put into force and that this Administration implemented, whether it was reorganizing the intelligence community to taking action against the enemy overseas in the caves in Afghanistan and the laboratories in Afghanistan where they were planning their work, whether it was enacting the Patriot Act or putting into effect a system for detecting conversations among terrorists.

All of these things made a big difference in minimizing and reducing the risk of a successful attack. Had we not done these things, had we shrugged our shoulders and said, boy, that was a really bad attack on September 11th, let's empanel a grand jury and indict a few people, I'm pretty confident there would have been attacks successfully again and again and again, and I think, as we contemplate the last eight years and there's certainly been a lot of criticism about things in hindsight that people would have done differently, I do think that you have to reflect on a surpassing achievement of this president which is keeping the country safe.

I also have to say to the president, whether you agree or disagree with every decision he made, has done so with the interests of the country at heart and in a manner that upholds what I think is the honor and dignity of the office.

But let me now turn to the core of what I want to talk about which is how we manage the kinds of crises at the Department of Homeland Security that emerge or that might emerge from time to time. Of course, a most common crisis we've had over the last eight years has been a natural disaster because we haven't had a successful terrorist attack since September 11th, and this past year, as I indicated, was another year of substantial natural disaster activity, whether it was the wildfires in the Fall of 2007 in California, an unprecedented flooding in the Midwest along parts of the Mississippi River in Iowa and other places, tornadoes in the Midwest, and, of course, Hurricane Gustav and Hurricane Ike. All of these posed enormous challenges to the local populations and to the Federal Government.

In each of these cases over the last year, the point of the spear and the federal response supporting local and state government was the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, and I believe in each of these cases, it's generally acknowledged FEMA acquitted itself very well. That's, however, not merely a tribute to a lot of the rebuilding work that's been done with FEMA but it had a lot to do with partnership, partnership with state and local authorities with whom we have planned and worked over the past few years, partnership with our own law enforcement personnel, agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, Air Marshals from TSA and Screening Officers from TSA, all of whom have come to work to support FEMA in doing the job of providing a federal voice and a federal capability when people in states and localities are in distress.

Just to give you some examples, Customs and Border Protection provided security for the transit of life-sustaining goods in many of these disasters and also provided aerial assets that allowed us to survey the damage. TSA supported 20 FEMA commodity distribution locations in the area of Harris County, which is where Houston is, in Texas, putting 366 employees into the field, doing not their normal day job but supporting FEMA by providing hands and boots to distribute food to people in need. Our Coast Guard performed myriad land, maritime and air search and rescue missions.

So in each of the cases that FEMA was maybe the best-known example of DHS acting in support of disaster relief, FEMA was supported by all of the elements and all of the powers of the Department of Homeland Security, and I think there are three lessons that come out of this last year in terms of the way we worked.

First, when it comes to any kind of an incident, crisis incident, whether it's a natural disaster or a manmade disaster, planning and preparation are the essential precondition of doing a good job. Gustav was a result of years of planning with the state and local authorities and the ability to make sure, even when an unexpected event occurred, that we were able to improvise because we had a sound foundation in terms of our ability to have a plan and to have trained and exercised the plan.

Second great lesson from 2008 is what I call the three Cs: cooperation, communication, and coordination, which at all levels of government are essential if we are to respond effectively to a disaster.

And finally at the federal level, I daresay that the integration of our preparedness and response functions under a single roof, the Department of Homeland Security, has been a major contributor to the ability of FEMA and all of the other agencies to get together and make sure that we were able to provide a very sound and effective response capability in, whether it be fire, water or wind, natural disasters across the country.

Now, why am I bringing this up? Because, as we go into the transition, I do see there are some who call for the removal of FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security, and I think I want to take this issue on directly because it has arisen, it arose before the department was formed, it's arisen, I think, throughout the department's existence, and it has now, of course, a subject of some discussion again.

I begin by observing, of course, that FEMA is – that DHS is a young organization. It's a little over five years old and even in this five years, there's been a lot of reorganization. But the core of the argument made about FEMA is that somehow FEMA's involved with consequence management, dealing with the response, and DHS, in other respects, is dealing with preventing or protecting against a response, and that if these are different functions, that therefore they ought to be under different roofs, and I really beg to differ with that. I think that is a profound misunderstanding of how one plans and prepares and executes in the face of a possible emergency and an actual emergency because the truth is emergencies don't come neatly packaged in stovepipes and if there's any lesson we've learned in dealing with terrorism or dealing with any other crisis, it is that stove-piping is the enemy of efficient and effective response.

Let me be more specific. The fact that FEMA and other components of DHS have had an opportunity during times of rest to plan, train and exercise together and to build capabilities that are capable of crossing jurisdictional lines has allowed us to have the kind of capabilities to support an emergency that would not be the case if we were in different departments.

Simply put, what we do is when we get our communications equipment on our aircraft, we train our operators whose day job is perhaps patrolling the border or dealing with maritime incidents with the Coast Guard, we train them to support a response if the need for response comes upon us. You could not do that if we were located in different departments. So the ability to plan, train and exercise together is a function of our ability

to be integrated together.

A second reason why FEMA fits well in the department is because, once we have an event and it's necessary to quickly call upon other agencies, the quickest way to do that not by reaching to another department of government and having a mission assignment and requiring the other department to then come in and lend assistance, but it's to have the ability of the Secretary to immediately order assistance to be rendered in all of the elements and capabilities of the entire Department of Homeland Security. This is not merely my opinion. Two people in a position to know because they've watched the department since its formation and because they were responsible for its creation in significant part have also endorsed this view.

Citing FEMA's successful response this year to a number of disasters, the current U.S. Senate Homeland Security Chairman, Senator Joe Lieberman, and the Ranking Member, Senator Susan Collins, had this to say in a joint letter they published in yesterday's New York Times, actually today's New York Times: Supporting FEMA's Continued Participation as Part of DHS. "Lives are saved when skills, resources and missions are united, not disbursed."

This, by the way, is a lesson we've learned in national security. When the Department of Defense was first created, you know, the Navy didn't want to be in it, the Marine Corps didn't want to be in it, the Army didn't want to be in it. Everybody viewed it as a diminution of their traditional prerogative as a stand-alone department, and they resisted the full integration of the department all the way into the late 1970s, when the consequence of failure to integrate was, of course, a disastrous result in Desert 1, the failed effort to rescue the hostages during the Carter Administration, and it was as a direct result of that that the Goldwater-Nichols Act in the next decade cemented a quality of jointness that brought all the elements of power together, and what we're learning now, by the way, is increasingly that in our foreign activities, our national security activities, we need greater integration between the warfighter and the rebuilders than we've had before, and I would argue that, just as we're learning that lesson overseas, we should not be unlearning it here at home.

Finally, I observe this. Many of those who argue that FEMA ought to be pulled out of the department do so because their vision is that, where FEMA is about natural disasters and hurricanes and not terrorism and that's what the rest of DHS is about. But need I remind you that one of the critical elements, if there were a serious terrorist attack, would be the need to have an effective response and a response not to a weather event but a response perhaps to a dirty bomb or multiple improvised explosive devices or a biological weapon, and in order to have that capability, FEMA needs to continue to be a consumer of intelligence and expertise that the entire department brings to the issue of combating terrorism.

But let me stand back even from the narrower issue of FEMA's participation in the department and look more generally at the role of the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security as the incident manager when there's an incident that cuts across agency lines and has national implications.

When DHS was created and shortly after it was created, the president issued a Homeland Security Directive known as HSPD-5 which put the Secretary in the position of the operational incident manager in the case of a terrorist attack or natural disaster of significant consequence. The purpose of doing this was to recognize that while the White House guides policy, the operational planning, training and execution needs to be in a department and the conception was that the Department of Homeland Security wouldn't control the other departments but that there would be someone who would be saddled with a central responsibility to make sure all of the components of the operators were being synchronized and working well together.

This is, of course, a reflection of what they call the Incident Management System which has been adopted in many states as their way of dealing with incidents at the state level. It's a recognition of the fact that again crisis management and consequence management are part of a spectrum, that when you're dealing with a potential terrorist attack, for example, you are simultaneously looking at how you prevent further attacks, how do you protect against the attacks that are underway, and how do you respond and mitigate the attacks that have occurred. If you don't bring all these elements together, what you have is a disconnected response and it's that kind of disconnection that causes the kinds of problems that are often complained about when there's a terrorist attack and a failure to effectively respond.

That is really, in my mind, one of the core missions of the Department of Homeland Security. What happens when you don't have someone to coordinate the incident across the entire spectrum of prevention, protection and response? Well, I would argue that that's what we saw in Mumbai, India. Again, this is not my opinion. This is what was reflected in the Wall Street Journal a couple days ago when they wrote about a lack of communication between the fire responders and the emergency responders, the police and the military dealing in the hours and then days after that initial assault in Mumbai.

The failure to coordinate all of those elements led to delay and uncoordination and resulted in criticism directed against the government by the citizens of India itself. This is not again my opinion. I'm not commenting. I wasn't there. This is what the papers are reporting the citizens of India have indicated. What you come to recognize is without the kind of incident management and coordination that we are building at DHS, joint planning, joint execution, cutting across the lines of the different operators, without that kind of capability, it's easier to have a disconnected response than to have a coordinated and properly connected response.

Now let me give you some examples of what happens when we do do it the right way, when we do have properly coordinated response on an operational basis. In July 2006, you may recall that there were questions about the safety of Americans living in Lebanon during the war between Hezbollah and Israel. Working in a coordinated way with CBP and TSA and the State Department, using this incident management construct, DHS was able to facilitate the repatriation of Americans who had to leave Lebanon literally under the stress of fire fights in order to make sure they were not engulfed in the struggle between Hezbollah and Israel.

A month later, in August 2006, when the U.K. aviation plot directed at flights from Britain to the U.S. was revealed, we were able to coordinate TSA, again the State Department, Defense, and Customs and Border Protection, in a concerted response so that we could, within less than eight hours, completely transform the way we dealt with flights and airline security to prevent any element of that airline plot from coming to fruition.

And to use a different example, in June 2007, we had two successive emergencies that were resolved through incident management. One was a scare that turned out to be unfounded that we might have foot and mouth disease that had entered the country through swine. For those of you who don't know, that is a potentially calamitous livestock disease. DHS and its components worked with the Department of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, the FBI and the National Counterterrorism Center to immediately assess whether this was a terrorist incident, to develop a common situational picture of what was going on, and to swiftly determine that the matter was not a threat. Had it been a threat, we would have then put into effect certain protocols at the border and certain medical protocols which would have mitigated the damage.

A day after we resolved that problem, we had the London and Glasgow terrorist attacks, culminating in the effort to blow up the airport in Glasgow, and we were again able to coordinate a response with Customs and Border Protection the Transportation Security Administration, and other elements of national power. That is the essence of incident management the ability to wield a lot of different organizations and bring them together to work in a coordinated way, and I think that is the harvesting of the seeds that were planted when this department was first founded.

So, in conclusion, always welcome words to those who are listening to a speaker, as we look ahead to the challenges of the future, I believe that we have built a firm foundation in incident management and in integration with the department, a foundation that was, I believe, part of the original conception by those who framed this department.

Now, it's not a fully-built and polished structure. We've laid out the basic architecture and I believe and I'm confident my successors will continue to strengthen and elaborate on this structure in a way that will ultimately result in making this country safer. No disaster is ever going to be painless and easy. That's why they call it a disaster and not a picnic. But we can make it less difficult, less costly, and, most important, less deadly if we are able to respond quickly, effectively, and in a coordinated way, in the manner that I think we've become able to do over the last several years, and so I wish my successors well as they continue to carry out the most important mission you can have as a public servant, which is protecting the citizens of this country against any kind of harm, whether it be manmade or natural.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Davis: The Secretary has generously agreed to spend some more time with us taking some of your questions. So you can show him by hands.

Secretary Chertoff: If you would just tell us who you are, that'd be helpful.

Dr. Davis: Josh?

Question: I'm Josh. I have a question about what responsibility the Department of Homeland Security has with respect to cyber threats.

Secretary Chertoff: That's a great question. Earlier this year, the president unveiled a National Cyber Security Strategy and it was a recognition that many of the cyber assets that are under attack are in private hands. A significant number are in the military domain and others are in the civilian government domain.

Essentially under this strategy, again there's a coordination function. We work with DoD and elements of the intelligence community. First, the Department of Defense protects its assets. We are currently in the process of developing a series of protections for our federal civilian government assets, including reducing the number of access points to the Internet and deploying real-time intrusion detection capability, and then we are also tasked with approaching the private sector about how it is that we can help enable them to protect themselves, and in order to do this, we will be able to call upon all the elements of the federal government, including the intelligence community.

So again, this is an area where it is not solely within our domain. It's a shared obligation but one in which we work very closely with the Department of Defense and the intelligence agencies so we can bring all of our capabilities together but everybody plays the position in the field that is appropriate for their authorities.

Question: Thank you.

Question: Do you recommend the next Administration continue the UASI Grant Program as the primary means of getting federal Homeland Security dollars to states?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, it's not the primary means but it is a primary means. I do recommend that it be continued. For those who don't know, it's the Urban Area Security

Initiative. It focuses on urban areas which are particularly high-risk for terrorist attacks. It has been largely risk-based. It's one of the few grant programs I'm aware of in the federal government where it really is risk-based. It's not based on, you know, particular political figures, you know, handing out benefits to their district.

I want to, by the way, take the opportunity to compliment the appropriators who deal with our appropriations because they've been quite responsible and dedicated in making sure they protected our ability to be risk-based and they've done themselves a lot of credit and I think the country a lot of good in being disciplined that way.

Question: I know it's not really within the department's jurisdiction, I guess, but I was wondering if there's any specific kind of soft power initiatives you believe that we can start – begin to incorporate as part of changing the attitudes and improving our homeland security.

Secretary Chertoff: Well, let me tell you what we do already, first within the department and then generally.

I've done a lot of – I spend a lot of time trying to do outreach to people in the Muslim community and I know that other agencies of the government are trying to do that as well. One of the greatest ways we can do outreach, of course, is by providing foreign assistance and aid around the world. You know, the president has put a lot of effort into the Anti-AIDS Initiative in Africa, the Malaria Initiative. You know, I can't prove to you there's an immediate return on investment in doing that, but I believe, and I think there's some polling data to support this, that when you provide that kind of assistance, you build goodwill.

I'm a believer in what I would call all of the above, hard power and soft power. Soft power means you influence by leading by example, by showing how you are willing to help people and helping them build good institutions which I think is important. Hard power is obviously sometimes boots and guns.

I think it's a mistake to use only hard power. I also think, though, that only soft power is not going to do the trick because there are some people that you need to make it clear, to whom we need to make it clear that force will be met by greater and decisive force, and so I think all the tools in the toolbox ought to be deployed.

Question: In light of recent issues with imports as far as the milk, formula milk and things like that, do you see the department kind of taking more initiative in what kind of efforts you see as far as protecting consumers?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, we actually were part of the task force the president set up some time ago involving the issue of imports which, of course, came up right after that pet food issue with the melamine.

Now, we're not the scientists. We take direction from the FDA and other agencies about what it is we ought to be excluding, but we are the operators. We will in fact inspect and exclude food or other products that are hazardous to the United States, once the appropriate scientists have determined that that's true.

I think this is an increasing area of concern in a global environment. How do we make sure that the products that we consume are not adulterated or dangerous in some way? In the end, of course, the best way to deal with this is at the source, not to hope that we catch it at the port of entry but to hope that we can effect the source where the contamination occurs, and I think that's part of what Secretary Levitz tried to do at HHS, which is to push the companies to take responsibility and make sure when they're buying things in other parts of the world, they're checking to make sure the product is safe and wholesome.

Question: I have a question. You discussed integrating different elements of Homeland Security apparatus within the country. Do you feel that the creation of DHS has helped integrate or to help cooperation with other governments in tackling these problems and do you believe there was a problem before the creation before DHS that this has addressed?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, I can certainly say it's helped. Most governments actually have what is generally in most countries called a Minister of the Interior which is unlike our Secretary of the Interior which in other countries is called usually the Secretary of the Environment. But the Minister of the Interior or Home Secretary in most countries is my counterpart and the relationship we have built in terms of border security, exchange of travel information and trade information and other kinds of intelligence has been, I think, a real success story certainly during my tenure.

We have signed a number of agreements with our foreign counterparts that have dramatically increased the amount of information we exchange, that coordinate our security efforts, whether it's aircraft or maritime, the maritime domain, and in that sense, we have – by bringing together all the elements that deal with travel and trade security, airline security, border security, we have been a coordinated point of contact for many countries where we didn't have a counterpart previously, and I think that's been very helpful.

Question: Yes, sir. I'm in the private sector, in the oil and gas sector. Thirteen MTSAs facilities and six ports and we've had the pleasure of working with the Coast Guard over the past number of years and we really think that they've been a model for the public and private sector trust and partnership, and I was just wondering what you see as the growing role of the Coast Guard on the prevention and preparation for a terrorist attack.

Secretary Chertoff: Well, obviously the Coast Guard plays a huge role in the maritime domain in terms of prevention and protection.

It might be interesting, though, to – for people to understand that the Coast Guard has actually become a very important part of the DNA of the whole department. It's not an accident that many of the senior leaders in other parts of the department are retired Coast Guard admirals because the Coast Guard does have a terrific record of being able to integrate law enforcement, military and civilian functions in a total package. So not only is the Coast Guard playing a critical role in port security, working in very close contact with Customs and Border Protection, but they're actually a major enabler in terms of our integrated planning and operational activity at the department as a whole.

Dr. Davis: There was another one back there.

Question: I read this morning in the papers that you're –

Secretary Chertoff: Always a dangerous lead-up to a question.

Question: Your views on soft power, the necessity of soft power in the Department of Homeland Security have come about in the last six months or have been shaped in the last six months, and I'm curious what – what sort of shaped those thoughts.

Secretary Chertoff: I think it's more than in the last six months, as we've emerged out of the period of really focusing very intently on building our operational capabilities and doing the immediate focus on protecting the country in the shorter term, I've had an opportunity to reflect a little bit and I'm not so sure I'd exactly say I realized it in the last six months as I decided in the last six months I would begin to articulate a somewhat broader and more long-term vision of what we might do in order to prevail in this struggle against what I think is an extreme ideology or a number of extreme ideologies and so although we've been doing a lot of outreach, which is an element of soft power, for a couple of years now, I think my desire to articulate it as a specific goal really came about as part of my effort in the last six months to kind of lay out in a series of speeches and, frankly, articles my vision of what Homeland Security is like five and 10 years out.

Question: Hi. My name is Stephanie Grosser. I was wondering if you felt the workplace enforcement has been an effective way of dealing with the undocumented population and also if you think that undocumented workers with civil violations was a real threat to the country and therefore demand the kinds of resources.

Secretary Chertoff: Well, I don't think undocumented workers are a security threat. I do think that the law of the United States needs to be enforced and I think if you don't enforce the law, even in less serious crimes, it tends to lead actually to more serious crimes.

I'm on the record and I continue to believe that there should be comprehensive immigration reform which includes a way of regularizing getting a fine, some kind of punishment for people here illegally, and then regularizing their status. That, however, is not the law. The president worked very hard to get that done in 2007 and it didn't get done.

On the specific issue of worksite enforcement, it's beyond doubt that by enforcing the law against employers, that's a major way to prevent illegal work. If you don't do that, then the employers are beckoning people to come in illegally while you're trying to stop them at the border. So it's like driving a car with one foot on the accelerator and one foot on the brake. You're not going anywhere.

So once you decide you're going to enforce against the employers, you have to ask yourself this question. Okay. If we go in to an employer and we say we're going to arrest you because we know 80 percent of your employees are illegal and you let every illegal employee just walk out the door and walk away, aren't you essentially sending the message that you're tolerating illegality? You're basically allowing people who you know to be here illegally to simply walk out without deporting them? And that would be tantamount to going in and, you know, if you were, for example, to arrest people involved in some other kind of criminal offense, you might want to get the kingpin, but you wouldn't allow everybody else who did something wrong to just walk out the door and disappear because that would essentially be creating a tacit amnesty which I think sends a very bad message.

Then, of course, once you decide you're going to stop those people and if they're illegal, you're going to get them deported, the next question I get asked is, well, why don't you just – why do you have to arrest them? Why don't you just release them and they'll operate on the honor system and they'll leave by themselves? Well, the problem is the honor system has failed 80 percent of the time. Eighty percent of the people released and told they should appear don't appear.

So in the end, you're faced with the fact that if you're going to enforce the law and you become aware that you're dealing with a large pool of people who are here illegally, you can't really turn a blind eye to it and I think that's why it is that we do enforcement that goes from the very top to the very bottom, and in almost every case, unless we have an identity theft, what we're really doing with people who are here illegally is we're deporting them.

I have to say it does have a positive effect in terms of reducing the number of people who are not only here illegally but, more important, it reduces the draw because when people weigh whether they want to take the risk of crossing the border illegally, the feeling that they may be caught and sent away is a deterrent effect. It also has the deterrent effect on the employers and remember this. You're not reading about cases where we go in and five percent of the employees are illegal or 10 percent are illegal or we're randomly going into businesses and just checking to see. You're typically seeing cases where 60-70-80 percent are illegal. Well, that tells you this is not an accident. It's a business model and you have businesses that have made a calculated decision to hire illegals.

Finally, I would like to say if you look at the most notorious recent case or famous recent case, which is the Kosher meat processor, it turned out that what was revealed through that series of raids was not just illegal workers but exploitation of workers, labor violations, health violations, and that's again not an accident. You know, those who build a business on illegal workers tend to also try to get away with other things as well.

So it's not the most pleasant thing in the world, but when people violate the law, we have an obligation, unless the law is adjusted, to enforce it, and I think if we don't do that, the American people will rightfully say why should we trust the government with any kind of reform when all that's going to happen is they're going to close their eyes and they're not going to enforce the law and we're going to continue to have the same problem over and over and over again like the movie "Groundhog Day?"

Question: Can you speak a little bit about the department's efforts to regulate the chemical sector and its importance to do so?

Secretary Chertoff: Yes, that's a great question. One of the big concerns early on is the use of not just the chemical weapon, like a weapon that you build with chemicals and you attack, but using chemical plants in locations that are populated as essentially a weapon in place.

So there's been a lot of discussion about this over the last several years and the approach we took, which I think is correct, is to identify all the chemical plants that use hazardous chemicals and tier them by risk, by how dangerous they are and where they're located, and then on the higher-risk ones, to set down a series of performance requirements, not micro managing and saying you have to have nine guards at this gate and you have to have a fence that's 13 and a half feet high, but saying here's the capability that you need to be able to have, resisting a certain kind of attack for a certain period of time, and then allowing the plants to devise or design the plan to meet those metrics. They then get tested or audited, but it gives them the flexibility to decide what is the best way to achieve the performance requirement that we are imposing.

I think that's a great example of combining the private sector and the public sector. We don't micro manage the private sector but we do lay down requirements and we give them the opportunity to meet those requirements as they best see fit.

Question: First of all, I just wanted to thank you for coming to speak. I know it's late and you probably want to get home, but my question is simple. How has the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security helped mitigate the drug trade, particularly the cartels bringing the substances across the southern border?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, part of what we do at the border, of course, is not just keeping out human smuggling but keeping out drug smuggling and actually there's been a decrease in some of the drugs moving across the southern border and more of them moved to bringing drugs in other ways or sending the drugs to Europe, at least in part because we've made it harder to cross the border.

You know, one of the – when I get arguments about why are you building a fence and stuff like that on the southern border, one of the things I point out is we're not just keeping out people who are coming in to work illegally or keeping out people who are smuggling drugs or other contraband into the country and the integration of the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection has given us an ability to address the importation of drugs across all of our borders, land, sea and air, which is an important element in making sure we're working to reduce the supply that comes in.

Dr. Davis: In the back.

Question: Hi. Thanks. I'm wondering how do you – how serious do you perceive the threat of Iran's increasing presence in Latin America? Thanks.

Secretary Chertoff: Well, we do know that Mr. Chavez has invited the Iranians into Venezuela and increasingly has created stronger ties with Iran. We know going back about 10 years ago, based on an indictment in, I believe it was, Argentina, that Hezbollah actually carried out terrorist attacks in South America. We know that there's been fundraising for Hezbollah which is a terrorist organization in South America.

So the concern obviously is bringing in a country that is certainly hostile to the U.S. into the hemisphere, that increases the risk of fundraising, it increases the risk of potentially facilitation of terrorist attacks, and it creates a network or an alliance of countries that are – have in common a hostility to America. So it is a troubling development in much the same way I think, you know, maybe less troubling but also certainly worth watching, is the increasing presence of Russian forces in the hemisphere which, to my mind, is a bit of an effort to kind of shove back at us because of some unhappiness with the expansion of NATO into areas of Eastern Europe that were formerly viewed as in the province of the old Soviet Union.

Dr. Davis: One more in the back.

Question: Mr. Secretary, I've been to several conferences and heard about a robust planning capability at the Headquarters level and it's called the INPT. I'm wondering if you can comment on the team and what advice you might give your successor on how to build on that team.

Secretary Chertoff: This – until this department was formed, interagency planning on the civilian side was not a very well-executed responsibility. The military spent a lot of time over many years developing a joint planning capability. The civilian side did not really have that and when I came onboard and we looked at the plans that we had, they tended to be very vague and not really all that well thought out and to be honest with you, the evidence

of that – I think I gave a speech saying that in July of 2005 and then, unfortunately, it was proven to be the case in August with Hurricane Katrina.

The only way to deal with that problem is to build a planning capability that brings interagency people together to build interagency plans and then to support them with department plans and the INPT, Integrated Planning Team, is designed to do that and it is in the process of planning and refining a set of plans on the interagency basis for dealing with the most dangerous reasonably likely scenarios where there would be a catastrophic problem, whether it be a dirty bomb or a pandemic flu or a huge like earthquake, and this is – you know, I tell you, planning is really hard. It's time-consuming. It requires a lot of people from different agencies to play together and that's not always easy, and it takes a lot of testing and refining, and it's not the most glamorous work because it doesn't result in immediate things you can – you know, you have a press conference to show, but it is the critical foundation of effective managing of any incident and so it's taken us awhile to build this capability.

It is really critical, for my successor's sake, that she continue building this because, you know, when you're in – the emergency happens and you turn and you want to open the drawer and pull the plans out, there better be plans there and, you know, I at least had the benefit of, after several years of experience, I've listed through a lot of different kinds of things, but as new people come on, having a good plan is a critical element in getting them up to speed as quickly as possible.

Question: I guess I had a question about leadership and making difficult decisions, and as you talked about a lot about government and making difficult decisions, so maybe you could just pick an area as an example and again these are types of decisions where no matter which way you decide people are going to disagree with you. So as a leader, how do you deal with that, and one particular example is activities under the Patriot Act where people portrayed this as a trade-off between security and privacy, and they're very difficult questions? Do you have sort of guiding principles that you used to apply in those situations and how do you think about that?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, that's a very perceptive question because you're right, the essence of leadership is you're going to make difficult decisions and by definition that means some people are going to be unhappy. Very few decisions are so obvious and easy that you get unanimous acclaim.

The Patriot Act, I actually think is actually not a particularly hard circumstance. A lot of people don't really understand what it says and it's basically a question of information-sharing and adjusting the ability to collect intelligence in terrorism so that it's commensurate with what we could already do with respect to drugs and other kinds of crimes.

I'll pick another example. Requiring, you know, secure documentation to cross a border. The people in the border areas are unhappy about that. They're afraid it's going to discourage impulse travel because people will need to carry a document with them, like a passport or passcard, but we know in the long run, if you don't secure the border, we could have another Ahkmed Rasan or another terrorist come across the border pretending to be somebody else and there could be a huge catastrophic loss of life in the U.S.

So in many ways, the essence of leadership is to me looking at the long-term interests of the country and the interests that benefit the greatest good and being prepared to make a decision in the long-term interests that benefits the greatest good, even if, in the short term, the people who are on the other side of it are going to be the most outraged because typically a small number of people who lose the decision are very motivated to complain and often it's based on a very short-term interest and it's hard to say because the people who are benefiting in the long term may not see the benefit, they may not see it in your term of office, they may never see it, maybe we'll be lucky, maybe no one will ever try to commit a terrorist act, but if you don't plan for the long term and the greatest good, you take an awful risk.

I would say that one of the lessons I've learned, maybe "the" lesson I learned in the last eight years is we've had three major catastrophic events, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the financial meltdown. In each case, the real nub of the problem was leaders made decisions looking only at the short term and sacrificing the long term. What do I mean? Prior to 9/11, although there was a lot of discussion about the need to have more security, we didn't have the political will as a country to put security measures in place that would have prevented 9/11. I don't blame this on either party. I don't blame it on the presidents. The country wasn't there. If one of the presidents had said let's have TSA search everybody prior to 9/11, they would have been laughed off the stage. That's an example of short term versus long term.

Katrina. Here's a little-known but remarkable story. The reason that became a major catastrophic flood was not the hurricane itself, it was the collapse of a canal wall in the 17th Street Canal. That wall collapsed because when the lake receded from the initial wind thrust, it went down to the south part of the lake and it became channeled into that narrow canal and that put hydraulic pressure on the wall and caused the collapse. So there's an obvious question. Why didn't you build a barrier at the mouth of the canal you could drop so you could prevent the surge and that's what we've done now. In Gustav, it actually dropped and it worked perfectly well.

So I asked the question, why didn't that get done before 2005? Did no one think about it? Oh, people thought about it. There was a proposal to build just such a barrier several years before. But local residents didn't want it because it was going to be unsightly and it was going to spoil their view of the lake and no one had the political will to overrule them and that to me is a classical lesson of short term over long term.

Finally, look at the financial crisis. This is one of the few crises that's not in my domain but again you have to ask yourself whether the failure to impose capital requirements and other regulation to protect against the low-probability/high-consequence event was a failure as well of our financial institutions and again that's not looking at the long term, it's looking at the short term.

So I would argue the essence of leadership is to be willing to look to a long-term solution, even if there's a short-term cost.

The last thing I would say as an example of this is, you know, when the president came onboard, he tried very hard to get people to look at entitlements, the ballooning Social Security Medicare, which, you know, we all get older and particularly when you guys get older, the number of people who are working who can pay into that fund is going to be much less than is necessary to support that fund if we don't do something about it.

You know, Congress didn't want to step up and deal with it because that's 15 years from now. That's 20 years from now. That's a long-term problem. There are many, many short-term requirements that people would prefer to pay attention to. So that to me is – if you – after this speech, if you come away with nothing other than this, it is we've got to stop letting short-term benefits outweigh long-term, much more significant costs. We've got to align our interests so that we look across the time horizon and think about what's going to happen 10, 20 and 30 years from now.

Dr. Davis: I think that's a phenomenal place for us to stop. So please join me in thanking Secretary Chertoff.

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This page was last reviewed/modified on December 3, 2008.