

Remarks by Secretary Napolitano to the President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee



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Secretary Napolitano: Well, thank you, Ed [National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) Chairman Ed Mueller]. And good afternoon—and I hope that your meetings today are useful because the subjects that you are participating in are very important to the success of all of our security efforts across the United States. As Ed mentioned, this is the first time I've had the pleasure of meeting with NSTAC. But I've heard about NSTAC for quite a while, and appreciate the work that already has been done with regard to national security and emergency communications preparedness.

NSTAC has a long and distinguished history of partnering with the federal government. It includes more than 25 years, five different presidential administrations, and so it becomes one of the models for public-private cooperation and partnership. We often hear that phrase bandied about, public-private partnership, but in the areas that NSTAC is dealing with, there's no other way to get the work done because these areas are divided between the public sector and the private sector. So we have to have some sort of way on a real-time basis to unite our efforts.

I know that you have focused in the past on the physical assurance of networks, internet protocol-based communications, and next generation networks. I understand that you're going to be voting on two additional reports that address cybersecurity, collaboration, and identity management. These issues are—the latter two issues are two issues that we have been discussing within the Department of Homeland Security [DHS] even during my short tenure there. And [Deputy Under Secretary for the National Protection and Programs Directorate] Phil Reiting is to my left; he is heading all of our cyber efforts within the Department. And these are some of the issues that we have been discussing as he gets moving and staffed up on a few things.

I'm also pleased, by the way, that you are updating the findings of the 2004 Satellite Task Force report at the request of the National Security Space Office. This is something that, again, I think will be very useful for all of us as we move forward.

Let me talk a moment, if I might, about cybersecurity. As you know, the Department of Homeland Security has been actively engaged in the review that the President ordered that has been led by Melissa Hathaway. And I want to thank NSTAC for its contribution to this review. I understand that you heard a report from Melissa this morning, and I look forward to working with you, with others, and with the President as we begin to implement the actions that need to be taken where the area of cyber security is concerned.

This is, in my view, one of the deep and emerging areas where we need to make more robust our systems, our protections, and our public-private collaboration because there is so much happening on such a rapid basis. I will also say this is an area where speed is of the essence. Oftentimes, by the time we are meeting about a particular issue, those who seek to create mischief or, indeed, do harm have already moved on to the next problem set. So this is something that we as well have been thinking a lot about within the Department of Homeland Security, and are very interested in your contributions.

On effective communications interoperability, I know it's something that NSTAC has been involved with. It was one of the real frustrating issues I dealt with as the—I was the Attorney General of Arizona and then served as the governor there for two terms—one and a half terms. Two elections. I thought I'd mention that.

Anyway, you know, because I thought you could just say: interoperability—come on. What's so hard about this? And have come to appreciate that it is not just a snap of the finger, although I also have come to suspect that it has to be easier than it's being made out to be in the sense of feasibility with the technologies that we do have. So this is an area that we really have on our list at Homeland Security to get this accomplished for once and for all—to have interoperability among first responders in particular should there be either a terrorist attack or a

natural disaster that takes out our standard communications equipment.

I had firsthand experience with this even as Secretary of Homeland Security when in February there were ice storms in Kentucky. Anybody here from Kentucky? I should have bet on the 50-to-1 horse. But in any event, they had ice storms in Kentucky in February that literally took out the telecommunications system within the state. And it also took out about 50 percent of the electrical power to Kentuckians. And so they needed generators to use on an emergency basis until power could be restricted.

And I was talking with the governor and I said, "Well, we"—meaning FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency]—"we have generators, but we need to know what size you need because we're not just going to move generators to a place if it's not actually one that can be used."

And he said, "Well, we don't know what size."

I said, "Well, why don't you call"—and we were talking about small towns in the very western part of Kentucky—"why don't you just call them and find out what they need?"

And he says, "Well, we can't."

I said, "Why can't you?"

"Well, because the telephones are out. There's no telephone communications. No cell phones. The cell phone towers have all buckled under the ice—weight of the ice."

And so they were relying for a while there on basically ham radios to be able to talk.

We were able very quickly, with FEMA, to move in some mobile communications trucks that have—they're effectively kind of patch trucks that could give us communications. But that was a good 24 hours to get that worked out. So, just to give you a little sense of why interoperability remains an issue that we just have to solve, and we need to solve it quickly.

I look forward to working with you. I heard the report that you gave the President this morning. I was at the White House situation room when that report was presented. I was particularly interested in the portion about figuring out how this partnership can be done on a real-time basis as opposed to, you know, occasional meetings or conference calls. But how do we make it a living, breathing partnership, particularly in light of the speed and urgency that attain to some of the issues that we're dealing with?

So I would appreciate your thoughts. I have a few, but I'd appreciate your thoughts on that as we move forward on these very, very important and significant areas.

Mr. Chairman, that is my report to the committee.

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