

Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at the Anti-Defamation League National Leadership Conference



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Secretary Napolitano: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you for that kind introduction, and thank you for inviting me to be the final speaker in what looks to have been a very successful gathering here in Washington, D.C., for the ADL [Anti-Defamation League]. Thanks particularly to my friends from Arizona. Where are they? I miss you guys.

And I will tell you, every morning as the Secretary of Homeland Security I get a kind of a briefing—a briefing from my own department, the FBI, and the CIA about things going on in the United States and things going on in the world that are part of the situational awareness that one must have in a position like this. And it always starts off with a chapter on the weather.

Because within the Department of Homeland Security, of course, is FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency]. And so, for example, today I got a briefing on some tornadoes. I got a briefing on some—the stage of flooding in North Dakota, where we are. There's a volcano in Alaska that keeps pluming. You know, these are things you need to know if you're in my job.

But when I started the job, it was the dead of winter. It was three months ago today, my three-month anniversary.

And it was so cold. And it was snowing. And I had just moved here from Arizona.

And I discovered in Washington, D.C., people actually use their coat closets for coats. We use them for our golf clubs.

And my very helpful briefers every day would put in a page on the weather in Arizona so that I could compare and contrast, for which I thank them deeply.

But in any event, it is a pleasure to be here with you to speak about the Department of Homeland Security and to take some questions. So we will have a Q&A session after my remarks. And I thought what I would do is speak briefly about—now that I've been at this job for three months, what is the Department? What is our focus? And then how do we intersect with the ADL?

Now, when I said I'll speak briefly, I'm often asked, as a recovering politician and as a lawyer, what I could possibly mean by that. And I like to tell a story that was told to me by Mike Huckabee. Remember Mike Huckabee? Who told a story of the writing teacher at the University of Arkansas, or one of their schools, who said he would give the highest to the student who could write the shortest story containing four fundamental elements of fiction. And the fundamental elements were religion, royalty, sex, and mystery. Religion, royalty, sex, and mystery. And the highest grade went for the following story:

"Oh, God," said the queen, "I'm pregnant and I don't know who did it."

So we'll take that as our guidepost for my own remarks, and then take the questions.

As was said, this is a huge department. It's the third-largest department in the federal government, next to Defense and Veterans Affairs. It's 200,000-plus employees. It was created after 9/11 by combining 22 separate agencies, all under one umbrella. It is spread all over the District of Columbia in 40 different locations. The current headquarters, where I sit, is an old Navy depot up across the street from American University, although in a few years we will be headquartered in what is currently St. Elizabeth's Hospital, which is going to be totally renovated and really converted into a lovely campus for the Department of Homeland Security with money that was contained in the stimulus bill that the Congress just passed. So that work is underway as we speak.

With 22 different agencies, 22 different histories, 22 different legacies—how do you create a department, and a unified department, under those circumstances? And what is the Department's charge? All these missions. What is its basic mission and what are we here to do? Well, after being here three months and having had a very

extensive study of it during the transition PR and a very close working relationship with my predecessor, Mike Chertoff, I think you can really consolidate the major issues in the department into five areas.

The first area is the area that really fueled the creation of the department in the first place, and that is the battle against and the prevention of terrorism and terrorist attacks. And that can be terrorism that comes from abroad of terrorism that is homegrown. There was some critique of some testimony I gave where I didn't use the word terrorism, per se. I used the phrase "man-caused disaster," which had been used by other secretaries before me, because so often we think of terrorism and the mindset is just al-Qaeda. And al-Qaeda is with us. It is a force, and it is one that we recognize and understand as an extremist force in the world.

But it is not the only such group, and so to use a different phrase is an effort to cause people to think more broadly about what we are dealing with, and that is those who seek to commit violence to impact broader societies through their economies, through the exercise of their freedoms, and the like. And that is what we are fighting, and that is what we are resisting. So the issue of terrorism, counterterrorism, in the broader sense is the number one mission of the Department. It is why it was founded, and it is what we grapple with every day.

A second mission of the Department is to secure the United States' borders. Now, what do I mean by—I said "secure," not "seal." And there's a very important distinction between those two words. Sealing is to imply that you can somehow put a dome over the United States and these thousands and thousands of miles of borders, both land and sea, and that you will have then solved the drug issue, the immigration issue, et cetera, et cetera.

Well, anybody who suggests that there can be a seal is certainly not anyone who has actually been or worked on a border. Borders are living organisms. People go back and forth. Trade happens. I met this morning with the United States [Border] Trade Alliance, which includes Canada and Mexico. The Canadians in particular are very concerned that as we add requirements to crossing that border, we will slow down trade.

We need to add the requirements, but we need to do it in such a fashion that doesn't slow down trade, that keeps those trucks moving back and forth, those lines short, and recognizes that borders, as I said before, are—in a way, they are almost like living, breathing organisms. And you have families that live on both sides. You have hockey teams that play on both sides. You have companies that have facilities on both sides of borders. So we have to secure the borders against the illegal narcotics, the illegal drug and bulk cash transfers, the illegal immigration that occurs, but at the same time balance that with our trade desires and responsibilities. So that's the second mission.

The third is related—and that is to be prepared, when the President and the Congress decide the time is right to implement or to provide advice on comprehensive immigration reform; but until then, to within our own administrative capacity institute smart, tough immigration reforms. How you enforce the immigration laws that we have is very, very important.

And so, for example, we have to recognize that the bulk of illegal immigration into our country is labor migration. It is people moving from south to north. It is people moving to where there are jobs and opportunities. It is people seeking a better life for themselves and for their families back home. And so what draws them to the United States is the opportunity for work.

So if you're going to deal with illegal immigration, you have to deal with not only the supply, the workers, but those who are creating the demand, the employers as well. And that has given rise to a shift in focus on immigration enforcement, and that is to really assemble cases against employers who consistently and intentionally use the illegal labor market as opposed to the legal alternative, and by doing so, open the door for illegal immigration and many times exploit the labor force they have, depress wages in the local area, and the like.

The fourth area that we have within our umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security is to improve our preparation for and recovery from natural disasters. Before I came to this meeting, I just spent an hour and a half on hurricanes. We have them every year. There's actually something—there's hurricane season. And hurricanes are big. I don't know if there's anybody here from Louisiana or Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi—you know of which I speak. And you know that every—Texas. Got some Texans here?

I thought so. In any event, Katrina was an eye-opening experience in so many different ways, a tragedy that could have been prevented in so many ways. Nonetheless, our job is to say, all right. What are we going to do so we never have an episode like that in our history again? And what lessons learned, and how do we improve overall our preparation for not just hurricanes but earthquakes, forest fires, all the other natural disasters that can occur?

And that is underway as we speak. And it is underway at the highest levels. Indeed, in a few weeks the President

himself will be participating in a hurricane planning session because the planning beforehand will enable us to recover better afterwards. Because while we're good, we're not good enough to actually not have any hurricanes. So we think we have to have hurricanes, but we can prepare for them and enable those who are in them to recover, recover more fully, more quickly, more efficiently, use those recovery dollars in the best way possible. So the improvement in preparation for and recovery from natural disasters is our fourth major item.

Let me just pause there for a moment and say that we have been really concentrating on the Gulf Coast these last three months out of concern that the recovery, particularly in the New Orleans area, was too slow, and that too much was kind of clogged in the system instead of money getting out to repair, recover, get on with things. And I'm pleased to say that even in the last few weeks, we've moved yet another \$100 million in recovery projects that we stuck in the process. Actually, we shut down some offices so we eliminate an entire level of bureaucracy to facilitate the movement of claims. We're in the process now of establishing an arbitration panel or process by which remaining issues with New Orleans can be resolved quickly so that recovery can be moved forward and complete.

And as I said to our staff, the issue in recovery is not a little silo on a budget item. It's how do you restore a community, a community to where it was, and how do you do that in the best way? So that has been a focus as a subset of our preparation for and recovery from natural disasters.

Our fifth and last one is to foster a common culture of unity within the department. We are one Department of Homeland Security. We are not 22 Departments of Homeland Security. That may sound easy, but in a way, it may be the most challenging of all the things I've said because many of these departments—Customs [U.S. Customs and Immigration Services], for example, has been with us since the days of the first government of the United States. I think it even predates the Constitution of the United States. The Coast Guard was founded by Alexander Hamilton, and it was founded, of course, to make sure we were collecting all the tariffs that we were owed. By the way, we had pirates then, too.

I never thought, by the way, when I moved to Washington, D.C., three months ago, that I would be dealing with pirates.

All right. But we are doing that. We are moving in that way. And I think those of you who have ever been managers of a business or any kind of a large organization, you can appreciate—when the department was formed, it didn't have offices together. It didn't have a common e-mail system. It didn't have stationery. It didn't have any common purchasing principles, program management principles, all the kind of nuts and bolts you have to have to have a large department with a complex mission move forward. Those things are now in place, and the department is moving forward as one Department of Homeland Security.

So we have the five major issues, five major areas that we focus on within our 200,000-plus employees and our missions. And we're going to do it. We have three approaches, three kind of cross-cutting things that we apply to each of those.

First, we can't do it alone. We need partnerships. We need partnerships with other federal agencies. We need partnerships with state, local, and tribal governments. We need partnerships with the private sector. We need partnerships with the not-for-profit sector, in so many ways. And that kind of gets me to ADL, which I'll close with here in just a moment.

Second, we need to use science and technology to our best advantage. Remember I mentioned to you the border and the need to have a border and to facilitate trade? And you know how you want to have documents so you know the person at the border is the person who they purport to be, but yet you need to be able to move lines. You need to make sure that what's in the truck is what the manifest says is in the truck, but yet you still need to move the lines.

So how do you do that? Well, the answer is the bridge between those two things is technology. And so the use of technology science is really something that we need to be applying much more rigorously and much more, in a way, futuristically to our security needs across the nation.

Thirdly, we have to use our resources that we do have wisely and efficiently. I started a process within our department called Efficiency Review. It has a 30-, 60-, 90-day set of triggers. I've asked everybody to find every thing, every place, where we can cut, not spend, postpone, spread out—whatever we need to do to be lean and mean and accomplish our mission. And we've identified millions and millions of dollars of costs that we can avoid, savings that we can achieve—everything from procurement reform, buying office supplies in bulk, to different ways of contracting for buildings and other facilities, to—this is my personal favorite—eliminating contracts to

develop new logos for the Department of Homeland Security.

So if any of you are logo designers, tough luck. Unless you want to do it pro bono, you're not going to get a contract from the Department of Homeland Security.

But these are days when all of us are called to do the best with what we have. And certainly with the mission of our department which is so fundamental of the safety and security of the people in this country, we have to be very, very smart and targeted on how we use the resources that we are given.

But that brings me to partnerships, and I want to close with that, because the ADL and DHS have had some good partnerships. In recent years, the Department has placed our employees in your advanced training school to educate us on the tactics used by extremists and terrorists; the strategies that may be used by law enforcement to deter, prevent and respond to incidents and threats; and to make us aware and sensitive to and cognizant of the civil rights and liberties that must be protected even while you are enforcing the law and conducting these very difficult investigations.

We also, of course, have our own civil rights/civil liberties area, section, within the department. And we have undertaken action, sometimes with ADL or other similar groups to provide outreach to communities of particular sensitivity and do some pretty unusual—some functions that you wouldn't normally place within DHS.

For example, we have been reaching out to the Somalian community in Minnesota for a long time before anybody heard about pirates off of the coast of Somalia recently. And we found that there were lots of law enforcement agencies that were reaching out to the Somalian community in Minnesota—in fact, I have this picture of people kind of running into each other on the streets—and nobody was coordinating between themselves on the federal side, and certainly not coordinating in terms of how to do effective outreach with that community. So we took that role on and are doing that.

Making sure that citizenship materials—how you get through the naturalization process? We want people to become citizens, but that the initial materials are available in different languages so that they have access to different populations even as they are learning English.

And, finally, really making sure that as we conduct our own work that not only are we effective, but that we maintain a scrupulous respect for civil liberties—that we understand that one of the things that terrorists seek to achieve is that we don't exercise the freedoms that we have. I mean, that's one of their goals.

So we need to get to the right and make sure we maintain that balance, recognizing the freedoms inherent in our country, in our society, and in our United States Constitution. Again, easier said than done. But it is a department that is dedicated to these missions, achieving them in the right way, and achieving them in a way that the American people can have confidence in. And I think on our three-month anniversary, we are well underway.

Thank you very much.

Secretary Napolitano: Take a few questions?

ADL National Chairman Glen Lewy: Yes. Follow-up with a Q & A.

Secretary Napolitano: Thank you. That was very kind. We're going to do some questions now. You're in charge.

Mr. Lewy: You're in charge, Madam Secretary.

Secretary Napolitano: Okay. Okay. Yes, sir.

ADL National Leadership Chair Rick Barton: What we're going to do—that's why I'm in charge on this.

Mr. Barton: We go to the microphone right there.

Secretary Napolitano: Please.

Mr. Barton: And we always start to the left at ADL.

Secretary Napolitano: But I'm in the middle.

Question: Hi. My name is Mark Schoendorff. I'm from Los Angeles, Calif. In Los Angeles we have earthquakes, and the last major disastrous earthquake that we've had was in 1994. It's now 2009. Unlike a hurricane or unlike a

tornado, they come unexpectedly and they affect a lot of people. Now that FEMA has been incorporated into DHS, what steps if any, hopefully, have been taken to, I guess, respond to an impending natural disaster in Southern California?

Secretary Napolitano: Yes. In fact, I was just in—I've been in Southern California twice in the last four weeks, once in the San Diego area, and once in—I was in L.A., actually, last Monday. And the answer is we're working very closely with California, its state emergency management division, and others. And you are right. That is a key difference between an earthquake and a hurricane.

With a hurricane you have a hundred hours ahead of time. You can pretty much know or have a pretty good estimate where it's going to land. An earthquake, it's 2 a.m. and boom, you know, something happens. And so we are doing planning for that and we are planning—I don't have the exact date, but I want to say it's within the next 12 to 18 months—a major national exercise focused on earthquakes.

Now, that one will be along the major fault that's in the Midwest that hasn't erupted in a while and the seismologists believe that it will. So we're doing a major multi-state exercise there, but we are doing similar types of things in California.

Yes?

Question: Thank you. Stuart Scher, Boulder, Colo. There's been a lot of discussion here at this conference and in the past about the balance between fighting terrorism and protecting civil rights. And one measure or the only measure I've really heard is have we been attacked again? By that measure, the last administration did a very good job, and so far, so has this administration. How do we measure the effectiveness of our efforts so we can decide whether certain, you know, infringements, perhaps, on civil liberties might be worthwhile?

Secretary Napolitano: It is impossible to measure a negative, in a way. It is easy to say what you caught, and it's difficult to say what you prevented, in part because you don't want to give lessons to others or set examples for others on what to do and what investigatory techniques were used.

I think what I can say is that this administration has a strong commitment to making sure that as we do everything in our power to prevent terrorist acts from occurring, that that is done rigidly within the Constitution and the rights provided in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. And I think you have to just express that sensitivity and then design your investigations and your work accordingly. How you measure that in terms of—well, if we went ahead and did this kind of surveillance or infiltration, would we prevent something? I think we have to ultimately say there are some things we just won't do.

Question: (Inaudible)

Secretary Napolitano: I just took Florida's emergency management director [W. Craig Fugate] to be the head of FEMA, so they may be a little surly right now. His confirmation hearing is tomorrow, so he is—assuming that he is confirmed. Just speak loudly, and I'll repeat the question.

Question: We had 90 meetings this morning on the Hill about immigration reform, which is a huge issue. And I just—in this group my question is: are there baby steps that are being taken that might be out of the spotlight where something is happening? Because we keep hearing, it's huge. It's huge. It will happen. Is there stuff happening now that might not be out there in the news that is going on with the immigration reform?

Secretary Napolitano: Yes. And that was what I was referring to when I said that that was one of the major initiatives of our department: smart, effective immigration enforcement. And, you know, that is really looking at our own internal processes, how we handle things administratively, making sure. For example, one area of concern has been the condition of ICE detention facilities.

ICE is Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It's the agency that picks up or holds illegal entrants once they are apprehended. And so I have actually—when I came to work, I found that that was way down on the org chart, buried somewhere, and wasn't really getting the attention that it merits. And I brought in somebody that I have great confidence in who really understands detention facilities, contract management of facilities, how to staff them appropriately, how to have the right medical care, that sort of thing, and really elevated that issue. I didn't need comprehensive immigration reform to do that. I just know that it needed to be done and we did it.

There are other issues. The change in focus in workplace enforcement, for example, did not require comprehensive immigration reform. It was a change in focus that we are getting ready to get out to our own—

within our own agency about what we want to concentrate on on the immigration side at the Department of Homeland Security.

They're kind of looking at the paperwork trail that one goes through when one becomes naturalized to see if there are ways to facilitate that. And, then I just signed in Mexico several weeks ago a number of repatriation agreements about what will happen and the different states that we will return illegal entrants in to Mexico. So all of that work is ongoing even though we don't have comprehensive immigration reform.

You bet. Back to the center.

Question: Dave Coleman from McLean, Va. After the Holocaust, many survivors were very wary of any kind of government documents or identifying papers. Many Jews were even scared to circumcise their children for fear that the government could too easily identify them. How do we balance our need to identify people to protect our security with the kind of American feeling that they have a right to privacy and you have a right to not have to identify yourself to the government, and you should be able to just live anonymously about the government knowing too much about who you are or what you do every day?

Secretary Napolitano: It's tough, because we do have a sense, and really, a need for privacy. But on the other hand, you've got to have a Social Security number. You've got to pay your taxes. There are responsibilities that go along with being a citizen of the United States. There's a contract, in a way, between individuals and the United States.

So how do you have that contract and have it be a vital part of existence without undue infringement on privacy? One issue that has come up on is an issue called REAL ID, which was a bill passed by Congress several years ago, but they never put any money behind it. And the states, Democrat and Republican governors alike, resisted it because they didn't want to pay for it, quite frankly.

And so we've been, over the last weeks, meeting with governors of both parties to look at a way to repeal REAL ID and substitute something else that pivots off of the driver's license but accomplishes some of the same goals. And we hope to be able to announce something on that fairly soon. So, you know, that is a balance. But nobody really lives in the United States in a complete bubble. Right? There is a relationship there. The question is: how do you have that relationship in such a fashion that people's privacy rights are not violated?

Question: Hi. I'm Bill Mowat from Seattle, Wash. I just have a question around—we were talking yesterday. There's a debate currently in the press and all over the place about the role of torture and whether it was effective or non-effective in, you know, getting information that led to, you know, good things, people not being killed, et cetera, et cetera.

And I know this is very controversial. But the question I have is: do you think the administration in general, even privately and maybe not releasing much information, will investigate to see if there was any effectiveness and kind of resolve that debate, even if it is just internal, so that—I don't know—there's something going forward?

Secretary Napolitano: Well, I think the President has been very clear that he wants to move forward, that he is not interested too much in focusing on what was done in the prior administration. And, I think he said very clearly, and kind of what I said in answer to a previous question, there are some things we are just not going to do, that we are the United States. We believe we stand for certain things, and one of the things we stand for is that we don't torture. And, so, in a way, the kind of cost/benefit analysis is not that helpful.

That being said—that being said—you have to have ways to interrogate. You have to have ways to find information. You have to have ways to work with other countries to prevent terrorist attacks because there are people in this world who seek to do us harm. And let's be blunt about it. And so the challenge to us is to do that and to work to keep the American people safe in a world where we can never be risk-free—there can never be guarantees—and to do it in a way consistent with our fundamental values as Americans. And that is the message the President has sent to his cabinet, and that is how we will conduct ourselves.

Mr. Lewy: That's it. No further questions.

Secretary Napolitano: Thank you all very much.

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