

## Gov. Ridge Sworn-In to Lead Homeland Security

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THE PRESIDENT: Please be seated. Thank you all. Welcome to the White House. Today I signed an executive order creating a new Homeland Security Office, charged with strengthening America's protections against terrorism. And I've picked a really good man to lead that office. (Applause.) In case you hadn't figured it out, it's Tom Ridge. (Laughter.)

Together, we will confront the threat of terrorism. We will take strong precautions aimed at preventing terrorist attacks and prepare to respond effectively if they might come again. We will defend our country; and while we do so, we will not sacrifice the freedoms that make our land unique.

The best defense against terror is a global offensive against terror, wherever it might be found. Yesterday, we opened another front on the war on terrorism as we began conventional military operations designed to destroy terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban government.

Secretary Don Rumsfeld, who is leading a really fine team, will brief the country this afternoon. But he informed me this morning that the military mission of yesterday was executed as planned. And at the same time, that our good nation dropped over 37,000 kits of food and medicine. This is an important part of a war already underway that is being conducted on many fronts.

The first shot of the war was fired several weeks ago, as we began freezing bank accounts and cutting off funding of known terrorist organizations and front groups that support them. And I appreciate so very much the Secretary of Treasury's work, Paul O'Neill.

We've worked aggressively on the diplomatic front, developing a broad and strong coalition of countries who are united with us and involved in our campaign. And Mr. Secretary Powell and his team have done a remarkable job of rallying the lovers of freedom to our side. Mr. Secretary, thank you. (Applause.)

Our intelligence and law enforcement agencies are working around the clock and around the world. Attorney General Ashcroft, and George Tenet and Bob Mueller are all doing a fantastic job of making sure we've got the best intelligence and the best information, not only to protect ourselves, but to bring the evildoers to justice.

On all efforts and all fronts, we're going to be ongoing and relentless as we tighten the net of justice. This will be a long war. It requires understanding and patience from the American people. Members of my Cabinet understand that, and I appreciate them all being here. These are fine Americans, who understand the nature of the conflict, and are prepared to join me in doing whatever it takes to win the war, not only for our country today, but for generations to come tomorrow.

It's an honor for me to welcome the Ridge family here to the White House; the former First Lady of Pennsylvania, Michele; and of course, Lesley and Tommy, thank you all for being here and thank you for your sacrifice. (Applause.)

I want to thank all of Tom's friends for coming up from Pennsylvania. It looks like he's got a few who don't live in Pennsylvania as well. Thank you all for being here. I'm so appreciative that Clarence Thomas is here to swear-in Tom. I appreciate the Mayor of Washington, D.C. being here.

Mr. Mayor, thank you for your cooperation. It's just the beginning of what we need to do together to make sure our Nation's Capital safe and secure. As we've learned, we face new threats; and, therefore, we need new defenses for our country. And I've found the right man to coordinate that effort.

Tom Ridge has been a chief executive. He is a leader who has shown he can draw the best out of people and out of organizations. He's a decorated combat veteran of the Vietnam War. He's a patriot who has heard the sound of battle.

He's seen the reach of terror in a field in his own state. He's a man of compassion who has seen what evil can do. I've given Tom and the Office of Homeland Security a mission: to design a comprehensive, coordinated national strategy to fight terror here at home.

We face a united, determined enemy. We must have a united and determined response. The Homeland Security Office has a series of specific goals and will have my authority to meet them. One, take the strongest possible precautions against terrorism by bringing together the best information and intelligence. In the war on terror, knowledge is power.

Strengthen and help protect our transportation systems, our food and water systems and our critical infrastructure by making them less vulnerable to attack. Respond effectively to terrorist actions if they come. The Office will coordinate federal assistance with state and local efforts. America is going to be prepared.

The Office will work in conjunction with the new Homeland Security Council, chaired by me and made up of my Cabinet and other senior officials; the Office mission will have the full attention and complete support of the very highest levels of our government.

I know that many Americans at this time have fears. We've learned that America is not immune from attack. We've seen that evil is real. It's hard for us to comprehend the mentality of people that will destroy innocent folks the way they have. Yet, America is equal to this challenge, make no mistake about it. They've roused a mighty giant. A compassionate land will rise united to not only protect ourselves, not only make our homeland as secure as possible -- but to bring the evildoers to justice so that our children might live in freedom.

It's now my honor to call Clarence Thomas up here to swear-in Tom Ridge.

(The oath is administered.) (Applause.)

**DIRECTOR RIDGE:** Thank you, Mr. President. I'm honored to join the extraordinary team you have assembled to lead America. The attack of September 11th changed our nation in so many ways, starting with the lives of the thousands of victims and their families. It changed the lives of our men and women in uniform, who are courageously defending our nation today.

It changed the course of my own state, Pennsylvania, which now has a new governor. And it changed the way we look at homeland security, defending our borders from an attack and ensuring our preparedness should one occur.

Americans should find comfort in knowing that millions of their fellow citizens are working every day to ensure our security at every level -- federal, state, county, municipal. These are dedicated professionals who are good at what they do. I've seen it up close, as Governor of Pennsylvania.

But there may be gaps in the system. The job of the Office of Homeland Security will be to identify those gaps and work to close them. The size and scope of this challenge are immense. The President's executive order states that we must detect, prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to and recover from terrorist attacks, an extraordinary mission. But we will carry it out.

I am optimistic because of your leadership, Mr. President, because of the unprecedented support for you throughout the country and among my old friends in Congress. Because we will have the very best people working on it, and because our country's shared sense of duty and mission is unprecedented.

And we will operate from a few basic principles. First, candor. No one should be wary of coming forward when they see a problem. It's the only way to define a solution. The urgency of our task dictates candor about our challenges and confidence in our ability to solve them.

The second, cooperation. We must open lines of communication and support like never before, between

agencies and departments, between federal and state and local entities, and between the public and private sectors. We must be task-oriented. The only turf we should be worried about protecting is the turf we stand on.

Finally, as the President stated, we will continue to secure liberty, as we secure this nation. Liberty is the most precious gift we offer to our citizens. It's what the terrorists fear most, what they tried to destroy on September 11th. We will work to ensure that the essential liberty of the American people is protected, that terrorists will not take away our way of life.

It's called Homeland Security. While the effort will begin here, it will require the involvement of America at every level. Everyone in the homeland must play a part. I ask the American people for their patience, their awareness and their resolve. This job calls for a national effort. We've seen it before, whether it was building the Trans-Continental Railroad, fighting World War II, or putting a man on the moon.

There are some things we can do immediately, and we will. Others will take more time. But we will find something for every American to do. My friends in the Army Corps of Engineers remind me of their motto -- Secretary Powell's familiar with it -- "The difficult, we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer."

That's the attitude we need. The task before us is difficult, but not impossible. With your leadership, Mr. President, and with everyone working as one, I have no doubt we will be up to the task. (Applause.)

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