

## Gov Ridge Addresses U.S. Conference of Mayors

Release Date: 01/23/02 00:00:00

For Immediate Release  
Office of the Press Secretary  
January 23, 2002

Remarks by Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge to the U.S. Conference of Mayors

Washington, D.C.

GOVERNOR RIDGE: Thank you very, very much. Well, first of all, let me thank you again for the opportunity to spend some time with you. You have been more than open and generous with your time in working with the Office of Homeland Security.

We have a mutual interest in making our communities not only safer, but better. And I'm convinced that the new partnership and relationship we are developing with the group of seven will get us there. And I'm reminded not only by that wonderful video that you've put together, but also in my continuing discussion with Mayor Morial, that you are the domestic troops, that you are front line. And that is very consistent with the president's point of view. (Applause.)

The President has made it very, very clear that the war against terrorism has two fronts: one is in Afghanistan, and the other is in the United States. And in his directive to me to create a national homeland security strategy, it was pretty clear that the effort that we have to undertake together has to be a federal, state and city partnership, perhaps unlike anything we've seen in the past, as we build a safer and stronger 21st century.

So I'm very pleased to be here. I want to acknowledge -- at least they're registered; they've heard me speak many times, so I'm not sure all of these mayors from Pennsylvania will be here -- they say, oh, I've listened to him before -- but I know they're registered. I would like to say hello to my friends, men with whom I've worked for seven years as governor, Tom Murphy from Pittsburgh -- I don't know if Tom is here -- and John Street from Philadelphia.

I am hopeful that I have to be with your leader down in New Orleans on February 3rd, and this is going to break your hearts in Missouri and in Massachusetts when the Steelers play the Eagles in the Super Bowl. I just thought I'd throw that out there. (Laughter.)

And Mayor McGroarty from Wilkes-Barre, and Don Cunningham from Bethlehem. And I would be remiss if I also didn't pay public acknowledgment and a debt of gratitude to the leadership that Mayor Williams has provided to the capital city. We've begun to work with him very, very closely. And I appreciate the relationship we are developing with him, as well.

On September 11, America's mayors became a symbol of strength worldwide. Mayor Giuliani's commanding response in the face of the terrible tragedy that befell upon New York City helped calm a nation's fears. And now this country is counting on you to help ensure that our cities are prepared and our citizens are safe.

Now, the President has asked me to develop a national strategy for homeland security, but I need your help to do so. And I underscore that: I need your help to do so. Our office may be based in Washington, but the effort will begin in the big cities and small towns that you lead.

An important milestone will be on February 3, the Super Bowl in New Orleans. Last year we designated the Super Bowl as a national special security event, placing the United States Secret Service in charge of security. This is the first time a Super Bowl has been so designated. And Mayor Morial, working with Governor Foster, has provided invaluable support and coordination in order to get the job done.

Five days later, the Winter Olympics take place in Salt Lake City. It, too, is a national special security event. I toured the site two weeks ago, and was thoroughly impressed with the work that's being done to keep those 900 square miles safe, including all those extraordinary venues that the athletes will be performing on.

Mayor Anderson and Governor Leavitt have done an outstanding job helping to secure these games. And as

Mayor Anderson commented, our first priority is to make the games safe and secure. Our administration has done and will do everything possible to ensure we meet this challenge with abundant preparations for the expected, as well as the unexpected.

Obviously, there are no guarantees, but I believe Salt Lake City will be a very safe place to visit in February. Once again, the world will be watching America, and I think what they will see is the extraordinary accomplishments, the good that can come from working together.

We have two Democrat mayors working with two Republican governors, two impressive partnerships, two levels of government and two of the best planned, best coordinated and best prepared events in our nation's history. That theme of partnership --partnership -- is an important one as the President gets ready to announce the homeland security initiatives in this year's budget.

It includes unprecedented support for our nation's first responders -- the police officers, the fire fighters, the medical personnel who died for their country on September 11th. But you know, you know that these men and women risk their lives everyday. They did so before September 11th, and they've done so everyday since. They work around the clock to protect their communities, one home, one block, one neighborhood at a time. And for them, the potential of a new challenge, a new battle is with them every, single day.

Now, this unprecedented support that I'm talking to you about in this year's budget isn't a one-year-and-out initiative. This is a major investment. We want to empower cities and states to build upon their first-response capability, and then we want to help you sustain it in the future.

We're asking you to work with your governors and with us as we implement a seamless national strategy on terrorism. It's only possible through partnerships. And I'm not talking about the old Washington definition of partnership, which goes something like this: I'll tell you what to do or I'll tell you what you need, and then you'll do it. This isn't about what Washington wants anymore. It's about what our cities, our communities, our regions and our states need. (Applause.)

New hazmat equipment, bioterror training, new emergency communication system. The list is fairly long. And, depending on your own individual assessment of your needs within your cities and regions, we need to give you the flexibility to meet those needs.

The approach we will take will enable communities to build capacity so that cities and regions are similarly equipped to combat the widest possible range of terrorist attacks. In the process, making our cities more secure and safer, we will make them better. And by helping to meet your needs, we hope to change the old relationship -- cities-state-federal model -- into one based on mutual cooperation, collaboration and partnership.

I think we can all look back -- I certainly can look back to my time in Congress, and even the seven years I served as governor -- to know that that sometimes the city, state and federal relationship was not seamless; that sometimes the three jurisdictions struck out on their own, all well-intentioned, all with mutual desires and mutual goals to be accomplished -- but there wasn't the harmony and the coordination that we really needed in order to affect maximum change.

I believe the terrorism -- the threat of terrorism gives us an opportunity in certain areas to restructure that relationship and to create a lasting partnership that ensures that the resources that we provide at the local, state and federal level are put to their very best use. Now, the President will have considerably more to say about this tomorrow.

Now, this is just one part of our emerging national strategy. We will also work to build up our nation's immune system to bioterrorism. We'll provide more money for research and increase hospital's ability to respond to a bioterror emergency.

One of the opportunities the President has given this office, and I think it's an opportunity that this country should embrace, as we take a look at ourselves through the lens of security, we may find that if we look a little bit beyond just security, we'll find ways to dramatically improve our communities, our states and our country, as well.

Clearly, we want to ramp-up our support for first-responders in anticipation of a terrorist attack. But just as clearly, if we do a better job in supporting our police and firemen and emergency service personnel, we'll enhance the quality of life in our communities. We will be a safer community, surely, but we'll be a better

community.

Surely, we want to ramp-up our support for bioterrorism initiatives and combating bioterrorism at the federal, state and local level. Surely, we want to beef-up the public health system in response to the potential of a bioterrorist attack. But don't we all agree that in addition to looking at the possibility of attack through the lens of security, we say to ourselves, that infectious disease is a challenge to our individual citizens, to our families, to our communities, whether Mother Nature brings it to us or terrorist event imposes it upon us, so why not build up our public health infrastructure not only to combat terrorism, but also to enhance the quality of life in our cities and in our states.

And the list goes on and on. So as we take a look at where we want to invest to make ourselves more secure, we look beyond just security and find wonderful opportunities to make ourselves a better country, as well.

We are working with Canada and Mexico to institute smart borders that will keep terrorists out, while letting the flow of commerce in. Again, mayors on bordering communities, bordering cities to Mexico and Canada understand it's not only about making your borders more secure, but we have to facilitate the flow of goods and services, and people across those borders, because it has economic implications. It means jobs to our communities. So, again, by building better borders we make ourselves not only more secure, but we make ourselves better, because we enhance our economic capacity for growth. This is a national, not just a federal effort.

We will work -- we are working with your organizations and others throughout this country to find ways to share information with you in a more timely way. And I'll tell you, we're making great progress working on instituting a more effective threat assessment system.

We've been working with your organizations representing your law enforcement community, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, state police, others across the board, so that we can put some context or texture around the threat information that we share with you locally or on a statewide basis in the months and years ahead.

We have met with many mayors from around the country, and we'll continue to do that. We certainly appreciate the enthusiasm and the dedication and the commitment that you bring to our discussions, as we prepare a different kind of relationship, a 21st century partnership among the state, local and federal entities that all have a responsibility to help improve security around this country.

I believe that by working together we will provide not just a safer and more secure America, but clearly we will be a stronger and better country because of it. I look forward to building this kind of country with you in the months and years ahead.

If I might just make one final comment. I understand as a governor -- former governor, that mayors of cities have a great concern that the federal government may authorize and appropriate large sums of money, that there may be delays or impediments to the money flowing to your individual communities as you try to deal with ramping-up the capacity of your first-responders in dealing with your public health system. And I will assure you that we are very mindful of the need to get these dollars to you in a way that gives you some flexibility to meet your individual needs, but in a timely way so you get those dollars and put them to use as soon as possible. (Applause.)

I want to, again, thank you for the extraordinary cooperation that you've extended to the Office of Homeland Security. I will look forward to returning or seeing you tomorrow with the President. He'll elaborate in greater detail some of the ideas that I've shared with you. But to the extent that you're willing, we have a few minutes, I'd be happy to respond to any questions you might have.

Q I have a question about the proposed partnership that you're talking about. In California, we have a master mutual aid agreement that's statewide. It basically governs how resources get sent from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in time of crisis. It's all based on the notion of local control, because what we found out over the years is that all disasters are local.

And the people who are best able to marshal resources and point them in the right direction are local folks. So I'm intrigued by your description of this seamless partnership amongst the different levels of government. It sounds great, but I -- my question is, will it be based on the notion of local control?

GOVERNOR RIDGE: In one word, yes. Let me elaborate. First of all, to the point you made, one of the

opportunities I think we have as we develop this partnership -- the 21st century security partnership, the federal government and the state and local government -- is to see to it that all 50 states have statewide plans and have local plans and have mutual aid plans. And you can well-imagine as you survey the 50 states that some states have been more aggressive in adopting these mutual aid pacts and really thinking about their local and regional needs and others.

So, clearly, one of our goals in creating this partnership is to have the cities and the counties and the regions, particularly the smaller communities, develop mutual aid pacts. You're going to see that -- as a governor, I realized that the governors need resources to do what they need to do at the state level, but the bulk of the resources have to be driven down to the local level. And I think you'll be pleased with the manner in which we're seeing to it that the bulk of the resources get to you and that you're given some flexibility to deal with them.

As you know, the Department of Justice, FEMA -- you work with them, I mean, you've helped us do a national inventory and a need's assessment. And what we're trying to do is build up the basic capacity in just about every region in every city around the country. So we envision flexibility for you to help build up that capacity, and we also understand that the bulk of the resources have to go in your direction. And I think you'll be comfortable with how it flows to you in a timely way.

Q Ninety percent of the lettuce comes out of our community in the winter months. When 9/11 occurred we had a major problem in crossing the border. All of the field workers that come over to harvest a billion dollar crop were taking anywhere from four to six hours to get across the border.

Our governor helped by sending in the National Guard, reduced that time to an hour and a half to three hours. That goes away in just another month. We are very concerned, because we still have a crop out in the field to get out of the field. And it's going to be -- when you go to McDonalds they're going to ask, do you want that hamburger with lettuce for an extra \$2, instead of hamburger with fries. And so we're very concerned about getting that crop out of the field.

And we want to know what is the plan at the federal level to beef-up our borders? We understand the need for security, but we also need to get that crop out of the field.

GOVERNOR RIDGE: You're question raises a couple of very critical elements in our discussions with Canada and Mexico. First of all, in the supplemental that was passed by Congress and signed into law by the President in December, we're going to build even more capacity with Customs and INS to put additional agents on both borders. That still won't be enough, because we think, again, as we look for safer borders, we need to devise ways with our Canadian and Mexican counterparts to make it easier for people and goods to flow across the borders without compromising risk.

And we've got a couple of experimental programs we're working with up in Canada. I'll be going with several representatives from different executive agencies to Mexico the first part of March to try to streamline and harmonize on both sides of the border, means with which we can facilitate goods and services, but at the same time reduce risk.

We're very sensitive to the economic impact of tight border controls. We don't want to compromise security, but we think with the deployment of technology and collaboration between the two countries, we can really facilitate this. And that's a very high priority, I might add, for the President of the United States. He understands.

Q Governor Ridge, let me thank you for your leadership, particularly in the area of the national security special events. Louisville, Kentucky, where I'm mayor, I'm delighted we host First Saturday of May, one of the great sporting events of the world. We have a lot of outstanding international leaders and a lot of wealthy individuals who come from around the world to gather in Louisville, Kentucky.

As its mayor, we've always been concerned about the threat of terrorism because of the number of people who are there and assembled. I might add, I'm an applicant for such a designation.

I want to thank you for the collaboration, but I want to point out something that you've already mentioned here. The collaboration and the test ground, if you will, for cities like Louisville, Kentucky, the state of Kentucky and the federal government to come together as a working unit is a real opportunity to learn more about how we can handle events of this nature, because international events are going to be the thing of the future, not of the past. So it's my hope, Governor Ridge, to have the opportunity to work very closely with you and your office

as we move ahead.

Thank you very much.

GOVERNOR RIDGE: Thank you, Mayor. To that point, because I know it affects so many of your colleagues, we have -- it's unique to our country, unique to our culture -- but we have so many high-profile events throughout the country in all 50 states, where we literally have thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people, attracting both domestic and international visitors.

And I had a conversation with several Cabinet members, and one of the things that we will do in the future -- because we can't designate every major event as a national special security event; I mean, just think of the NCAA, think of the NFL, think of the horse racing industry, think of NASCAR, and the list goes on and on, where we literally have hundreds of thousands of people -- but we do think that there are certain practices and lessons and there are models that we can work.

And one of the things I assure that we will do for you as governors and for these organizations that put on these events, on a fairly regular basis host seminars. We're going to bring in some of your security personnel and sit down and talk to you about planning and preparation and coordination.

The mayor has done a terrific job -- Mayor Morial -- with Governor Foster. Mayor Anderson has done a great job with Governor Leavitt. But if you take a look at those two experiences and you see how the federal, state and local agencies coordinate their activity, that's really what a national special security event is all about. And we think there are plans and models that we would share with you as how you can go about seeing to it that you maximize security at the events in your communities, as well.

We're going to continue to recognize some as national special security events. But, frankly, if you have a widely-attended, highly visible athletic event, recreational event, or the like, you need to know what the model is and you can apply it. It's about collaboration and the partnership. And there are a couple of models that, I think, are working rather successfully.

Q Governor Ridge, I just want to echo the sentiments of many people that stood and said thank you for your leadership in this area.

I'm from the city of Detroit. As a major point of entry to this country -- and you've heard of our specific problems that we've had on our border, and actually Secretary Mineta mentioned the eight-mile backups of trucks, which affects the entire economy of the United States of America with the just-in-time delivery -- even with the spirit of civic responsibility, with the new patriotism, with this new spirit of renewed volunteerism, our police department, even in a coordinated effort, has spent an enormous amount of money and time on those borders -- people volunteer their time. Since Sept 11th -- from September 11th to December 31st, our police department spent about \$3 million. If we keep that current pace up, we'll be at \$11 million by December 31, 2002.

Referencing your earlier comments about those initiatives to actually push money down to the local level, are we talking about retroactive money making police departments whole, or are we just talking about prospective money? (Applause.)

GOVERNOR RIDGE: It's a good point. We would be -- as we prepared -- two things. One, as we prepared the budget -- and we'll be sending it up to the Hill -- there is some flexibility in that for you to use money for overtime. All right? I'm just going to tell you, it won't cover all your cost and you'll have to make a decision. But there are substantial dollars in the budget that's going to the Hill for equipment and training.

But there's a portion of those dollars that we say to you, because you may incur unanticipated costs in a particular period of time, that we want to give you a little flexibility to defer some of those monies to those costs. And the details you'll see in the course of laying out the budget, and I'm sure we'll have continuing discussions about the kind of flexibility that's in that budget. But it would be prospective -- prospective.

Secondly, to your point, it will be incumbent upon us, I think, at the national level to work with Canada to make sure that your burden, in terms of policing those borders and facilitating commerce, is reduced and hopefully one of these days even eliminated. And one of the many initiatives that we have with our Canadian friends involves the use of technology to form an EZ-PASS system between Canada and the United States, where people predesignated can basically flow through quickly.

We want to extend that to commerce, as well, so that companies that have historic relationships -- you have so many subcontractors on both sides of the border, so many companies that have been doing business on both sides of the border -- they can be checked and pre-certified on either side of the border so they don't have to wait either.

So the short-term answer is, we're going to give you a little flexibility to deal with some of these costs. The longer-term answer, particularly at the border, is an agreement -- we're working both with our Canadian and Mexican counterparts -- to deal with the flow of people, as well as the flow of goods, in a more orderly, 21st century manner, which includes, I think, pre-certifying people and commerce far away from the border so you can move across quickly, reducing and, hopefully, long-term, eliminating the need to put local law enforcement to help secure the borders. (Applause.)

END

This page was last modified on 01/23/02 00:00:00