

Border Reorganization Remarks by Secretary Ridge

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SECRETARY RIDGE: Thank you, Lois. I suspect that your colleagues know that in your six years of service you've been recognized as a very accomplished and talented member of the INS team. And it's no wonder that you're going to move on to a supervisory role. And it's no wonder they have you going out and doing a lot of public speaking on behalf of the INS. Thank you for your very, very kind words, and congratulations on your promotion.

Today, I stand before you as one of the 170,000-plus new employees of the new Department of Homeland Security. As the leader of this department, I thank President Bush for his support, the American people for their support and the Congress for its swift action in creating this department.

And I thank my fellow workers -- members of the Coast Guard, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Customs, Transportation Security Administration, INS, Secret Service, Federal Protective Services, FEMA and some of the other agencies -- some of whom join us this morning.

And I'd also like to extend my appreciation to the leaders from this great city and state who are also here to mark this historic occasion. For me, this is a comforting, determined and yet a very solemn moment, and I suspect it is for you, as well, because all of us know why we are here. And may we never forget.

Some 16 months ago, 19 hijackers took nearly 3,000 of our fellow Americans from us, along with hundreds of citizens from 80 other nations. On that haunting September 11th, innocent Americans came face to face with a new kind of enemy, a new reality, a permanent condition -- terrorism on American soil.

These enemies are villains. They are provoked by centuries of hatred, armed with ruthless tactics, absent any respect for human life, all lurking in shadows, preparing for their next catastrophic and murderous attack.

They are killers. They are empowered by the zealotry of evil, the ignorance of radicalism and the resources of tyrants we cannot ignore. They are insidious, a vast paradox of personalities and groups, some spontaneous, some very methodical -- yet they are all intent on doing us harm.

So let me be clear: While their actions surely broke our hearts, they did not and will not break our spirit. Their threats may never end, but neither will America's resolve. To our enemies: We do not cower. We are coming after you. Whether you're a nation bent on tyranny, a terrorist group or a cell, as the President has said, we will prevail. Whether your threats come via a suitcase or on a suicide bomber, pathogens in the air or armed passengers on an airplane, no matter the weapon of choice, we will use every tool at our disposal to stop you.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, our great country has become not only a stronger nation but a stronger nation, as well. Working in partnership with Congress, states and cities and the private sector, we have moved rapidly to map and protect our critical infrastructure, such as power plants and financial systems; seal our borders from terrorists and suspicious cargo; and prevent and prepare for attacks involving weapons of mass destruction. Our commitment and our resolve is clear -- we will do everything in our power to defend our nation against rogue regimes.

Americans can take comfort and pride in the progress, but also in the courage and vision of a President who quickly realized that we really needed to do more, to unify our people, our priorities and our programs under a single line of authority, a Department of Homeland Security. As the President has said many, many times, the only path to safety is the path to action.

So I welcome this opportunity to discuss this nation's 15th and newest Cabinet department and what you can expect from us at DHS in the months and the years ahead.

Let me say first that the President is committed to funding DHS efforts, so that, as he said in his State of the Union address, we will be ready to "answer every danger and every enemy that threatens the American people." This year, he's requested \$41.3 billion, the highest total ever proposed by any administration for homeland security. What's more, the Department of Homeland Security's overall fiscal year '04 budget represents a 64 percent increase in spending since just two years ago.

Until just under a week ago, no single federal department had homeland security as its primary mission. Now it is our mission, the people you see before me and behind me and to the sides, those protecting our borders, our airports, our waterways, our financial and systems, our energy and chemical facilities -- more importantly, our fellow citizens and our very way of life. They understand what their mission is. They also understand that their challenge is enormous.

Just think about what the new department will encounter -- and this is just some of what we will encounter on a day-to-day basis. Today, more than 1 million people -- just today -- more than 1 million people will cross our borders, some by car, some by sea, some by plane. Today -- just today -- 1.6 million passengers will board planes traveling within our borders. Today, 95,000 miles of coastline will meet our agencies' watchful eyes. Today, 2.4 million pieces of luggage will pass through this country's 429 commercial airports. Today, tons of imported food products will be inspected. Today, thousands and thousands of visa and green card applications will reach the desk of INS offices. And as you well know, ladies and gentlemen, that's just a partial list of what you and I will have to deal with every single day.

The sheer depth and breadth of this nation, the magnitude of what occurs here, from sea to shining sea, means simply that one slip, one gap, one vengeful person can threaten the lives of our citizens, at any time, in any number of ways.

Whether it's a member of TSA inspecting baggage at an airport, or the border patrol officer examining trucks for explosives, or the INS agent checking the authenticity of immigration papers, the good people -- the good men and women of homeland security are not complacent. They are ready. They are doing everything they can -- in the best way that they can -- every day, not for themselves, but to make America safer.

Oh, surely, the establishment of this new department, the reorganization of 22 agencies to strengthen our country, to improve our security is one sizable undertaking. We know. That notion certainly has not escaped us. But we have to organize to mobilize. Make no mistake, organization will matter, because from the homeland to the hometown, it will lead to outcomes -- it will lead to outcomes that better protect our country.

And one of our first goals for the department this year is to integrate old functions in a new way, to make us stronger and safer. As a first step to accomplish this, we will restructure our border agencies.

Under the very able leadership of Asa Hutchinson, our department's newly confirmed Undersecretary for Border and Transportation Security, this restructuring will establish two new border units. One of those, the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, will take our border entities -- Customs, INS, including Border Patrol, and APHIS, our Animal and Plant Health and Inspection Service -- and merge them into one unified, coordinated force at the border. So, instead of four faces at the border, America will have one. The focus here is to help legitimate goods and people enter our country swiftly, and keep dangerous people and their weapons out.

The second arm of our border and transportation security service will be the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This bureau will enforce the laws once the borders are crossed. We want to make absolutely certain, to the very best of our ability, that questions of immigration status, customs issues, interdiction laws and detention concerns receive the full attention of our officers and our criminal investigators.

I'm pleased to publicly recognize the very accomplished attorney who has been asked to move from the Department of Justice to head this bureau, Mike Garcia. Mike, would you please stand and be recognized. (Applause.)

Now this morning, the President sent this border agency reorganization plan to Congress, and we intend to produce, with your help, a more robust enforcement and protection capability to secure our nation. It is a very important first step in integrating the old functions so that the new department can be even more effective.

There's no doubt -- we will have to challenge ourselves as we begin to integrate and mobilize the Department of Homeland Security, but I have every confidence we'll answer this challenge in ways that will yield better

results and better methods to secure the protection of our fellow citizens and our way of life.

At the same time we work to reduce our vulnerabilities and increase our protections, we cannot escape the harsh reality that we cannot completely eliminate the possibility of attack. That's why one of our single most important goals is to bolster our support for state and local emergency preparedness and response.

I have said many times, homeland security cannot be and is not exclusively a federal strategy. It must be a national strategy and it will take a national effort. It's a national effort grounded in the knowledge that states and local agencies play the primary role in emergency response. After all, America's three million fire, police and emergency personnel -- we now affectionately and appropriately call them our first responders -- will be first on the scene and among the last to leave in the event of a terrorist attack.

The role of a new department is not to supplant the efforts and expertise of our states and localities, but to reinforce, to train, assist and empower them. Our aim is to have a Unified Federal Response plan in place so that we can communicate with all officials, inside and outside the perimeter of an attack, so that we cover all contingencies regarding additional threats and needed assets.

We want to look in our department as many ways as possible to push out authority and resources to the front, broaden communication, share information, so that when people respond to the incident, they have met and trained together before the incident occurred, so that when they respond they understand and accept the chain of command; that they have the help they need, as they scramble and many times risk their lives to aid and assist our citizens in the midst of a crisis.

Now if you want to look at how federal and state officials can best work together in the event of a terrorist attack, look to Florida. Just a month after September 11th, Florida's counter-terrorism strategy was the very first submitted to the Office of Homeland Security and frankly has since become a model, excellent model, for others to follow and emulate, of how homeland security should operate at the state level. Thanks, Tim Moore, great job. (Applause.)

Another immediate goal for the department is to streamline and strengthen information sharing. We will examine how we generate information and how we share it, not just within the federal family, but with the state and locals, as well. We have to make sure that the communication flow is not top down, but it goes in both directions. It's all about getting everyone to communicate with one another. It's about ensuring that they have access to the kind of information they need to do their specific job. And the big challenge, in this new department, with so many employees, is to make sure everybody is equipped with either information, technology or training to do their piece, to do their slice of their job.

So the end result whether it's a policeman on the beat, a consulate in London, or a Customs agent in Miami or wherever they are, they will be armed with better information, which means they will be able to do their job more effectively.

Another primary goal of the Department of Homeland Security is to establish and nurture private sector partnerships. And today -- I hope I haven't got ahead of myself -- but I believe the President is going to announce my special assistant for the private sector. And he is known to you in this community. Al Martinez Fontz. Al, would you please stand up and be recognized. (Applause.)

Currently, he's got a critically important mission. The private sector controls 85 percent of our nation's critical infrastructure, encompassing everything from energy and chemical facilities to our banking, telecommunications and agricultural systems.

Each sector, each sector has its own unique vulnerabilities, and calls for its own, distinct means of protection. The considerable task facing us today is that 12 separate federal agencies have oversight authority over this infrastructure. We have been tasked to unify this effort in the new department, and we will.

Already, we have begun working with lead federal agencies, representatives of state and local governments and the private sector leaders to assess risks and vulnerabilities, to identify best practices that can be shared and to share information that will result in more effective measures to counter terrorism.

These efforts to protect this country's critical resources will be strengthened by intelligence analysis for the nation's first Unified Terrorist Threat Integration Center, announced by the President on Tuesday night. And the Department of Homeland Security will have two responsibilities with the new center. It's our responsibility to supply our share of intelligence from the agencies and people within our department that generate that

information, and it's our job also to use this information and other information we get from the integration center to help map and then reduce our vulnerabilities.

And so I look forward to working with my colleagues, Attorney General John Ashcroft, Bob Mueller, George Tenet, Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld to make this new center a reality.

America has a very proud heritage. We have long been a nation of immigrants, with good-hearted, law abiding, productive individual citizens originating everywhere from Beijing to Belgrade, from Nairobi to New Delhi. It is the President's intention, and that of the department's, and certainly mine, that this founding principle must and will always endure.

To do so, we must improve and protect immigration practices. Through a newly created Office of Citizenship and Immigration, we will focus on doing things right for our country's own protection, but also to ensure that America remains a welcoming nation for people who want a better way of life, for people who want to make a contribution here.

We will continue to screen visa and green card applications. That is our duty, that is our task, and frankly, a lot of the people coming in will be part of this country's hope. But at the same time, we must also reduce the present INS backlog, decrease processing time and protect the rights and civil liberties of both naturalized and prospective citizens.

The bottom line in this: Everything we do -- reorganize to work better and more efficiently as a new department, partner with states and localities, work with private industry to protect our infrastructure and actually build, create better security tools, streamline and share information, improve and protect our immigration services and practices -- all adds up to this -- your country is ready, we're not waiting.

I know that the men and women of the Department of Homeland Security bring the same determination and the same spirit to fight for America as those who fought so heroically and left us ever so quickly on September 11th, 2001. The future may be unknown, but the mission and the critical responsibilities of the new Department of Homeland Security and every single employee is not. And I commit to you, that this nation will rise to a new level of readiness and preparation every single day.

And so this morning, let us mark this historic moment, not just for what we are setting out to do, but also for what we are setting out to preserve -- the pride of liberty we all feel as Americans. And again, I say to those who want to attack us and tear us apart, never, never underestimate us.

Today we go forward together, renewing the commitment that so many generations have made before us -- perhaps your parents and grandparents during World War II, and those so many generations before them -- the commitment they made to -- and pledge for freedom, to fight for it, to do everything possible, so that freedom will endure for the benefit of generations to come.

We do so with the understanding that Americans do not live in fear. We live in freedom, and we will never let that freedom go. Thank you very much. God bless you. Great being with you today. Thank you.

END: 10:36 A.M. EST

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