

Remarks by Secretary Tom Ridge at the Announcement of the Ready Campaign

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SECRETARY RIDGE: Thank you very much. Thank you for that warm welcome on a cold winter day. It's nice to be back in Cincinnati. People have asked why we've had a tendency to visit this community and this region two or three times during the past year, and I'm proud to say that we find that the citizens, the elected officials, the volunteer community and the city of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, and the region are doing things right, and we just like to continue to look to you for modeling as to the way we hope things can be done around the country. So thanks for that warm greeting.

And thank you, Marty, for those very kind words, and for all that the American Red Cross continues to do to get Americans prepared.

Let me also thank our dedicated partners who've made this campaign possible, the Ad Council, the Sloan Foundation, and your member agencies that have worked around the clock to produce this excellent and critically needed public information campaign. I do want to mention the Yellow Pages Integrated Media Association, whose members have committed the content of this program to over 500 million directories that will be distributed around the country this year. We've got a great team, and we're working together.

I also want to thank the Hamilton County Citizen Corps Council, your community leaders and first responders. The Citizen Corps has built very aggressive, a very active preparedness model, a role model for others. Well done. And thank you for your time this morning, and I look forward to continuing our conversation after these remarks.

I do want to recognize someone else I brought with me from Washington: John Bridgeland. I think everybody knows John. If you don't, he's an assistant to the President, working on America's Freedom Corps, Citizen Corps. He has fathered many of these institutions and we're proud to bring him back home. He's a proud son of Cincinnati and we're glad to have him with us.

I want to speak today, not just as Secretary of Homeland Security, but as a father and as a husband. As families and as a nation, we now live with a sense of unease, an uncertainty, that those of us who grew up after the "Greatest Generation" have rarely, rarely known. And, of course, this uncertainty, this sense of unease, is heightened during heightened national alerts.

The sense of uncertainty steals some of the innocence and some of the security that we painstakingly try to build for our children. It's not always easy to know the right thing to say or the right thing to do. We all want to stay aware and we all want to stay informed. And, at the same time, we do not want to surrender to fear. We'll never surrender to fear, because fear is the terrorists' most effective weapon.

So the threat of terrorism forces us to make a choice. We can be afraid, or we can be ready. And today, America's families declare, we will not be afraid and we will be ready. (Applause.)

So today, we launch the Ready Campaign. Its goal: To build a more prepared nation, one individual, one family, one neighborhood, one community at a time. We're launching this initiative through a multi-year, multi-media information and public service advertising campaign, donated by several private sector partners, reaching every single citizen in our great country. Our message is this: We cannot always predict an attack;

we can always prepare.

There are simple things you and your family can do to prepare for the unlikely but possible terrorist incident, namely: Make a kit, make a plan, and be informed.

First, an emergency supply kit. We would encourage people to start with three days' worth of non-perishable food and water. Remember, even if your community, if your home, if your neighborhood is not directly affected by an attack, your life or daily routine may be disrupted. You may need to shelter at home for a couple of days. Maybe the roads and stores would be closed, the electricity might be turned off, maybe your water supply will be interrupted. So we just want you to be prepared for that eventuality. Have some flashlights, battery powered radios, first aid kit and medicines. I think you understand the drill, an emergency supply kit. You can pull a lot of those things right off the shelf or right out of your closets right now, put them in one place, and go about the business of being a spouse and a parent and doing what you do, and that's enjoy living in the greatest and freest country in the world.

Oh, and yes, I have to say, stash away the duct tape. (Laughter.) Don't use it. Stash it away. And that pre-measured plastic sheeting for future -- and I emphasize future -- use. Experts tell us that a safe room inside your house or inside your apartment can help protect you from airborne contaminants for several hours. And that could be just enough time for that chemical agent to be blown away. That's the reason it is included on the web site and included in the emergency supply kit. Probably won't need it but, in case you do, you'll have it available. We would not recommend these measures if they did not make a difference. All the same, we hope you never have to use them.

Second, make a family communication plan. This is very important. After all, think about this. How often is every member of your family in your house at the same time? You're right, if your family is at all like mine -- and I'm sure it is -- it's rare. So you need a family communication plan. So quite simply, make certain that everyone knows how to get in touch and knows exactly what the emergency plan is. Every state, every community, every school, every workplace should have an emergency plan. Find out what it is, find out who's in charge. And if your school or your employer doesn't have a plan, then volunteer, volunteer to be a part of a group to create one.

The third piece of this very important, very simple approach toward being prepared is simply, be informed. An emergency is not the time to plan, it's the time to react. So be informed. Different types of attacks require different responses. The actions you would take in a conventional attack may be counterproductive if you took them in response to a different kind of attack.

Now, you can get the information you need by logging on to our new web site, ready.gov, or you can call 1-800-BE-READY. Let me say that again. The new web site is ready.gov, or call 1-800-BE-READY, and you'll get printed information once you make that phone call. For the first time, the right information, the information you need, will be in one place. Know what to expect, know how to protect yourself and your family from harm.

Now, there are added benefits to being prepared. We're having a conversation right now with a lot of your terrific first responders in this community, your police and firefighters. They tell us that avoiding panic and confusion in a crisis helps them do their jobs better. So when you protect yourself, you're protecting your community, and it's one less concern that the first responders have at the time of an incident. It makes sense for you. It also makes sense for you to support your first responders as well.

Now, preparedness can also help us cope with natural disasters. Families in different parts of this country prepare for different emergencies. Now, think about it. Tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, snowstorms. Families prepare, communities prepare as a matter of routine for those events. So let's embrace the same attitude and the same approach and take some simple steps to protect ourselves and our families against a possible terrorist attack.

Now, rest assured, ladies and gentlemen, we will prevail in this war. We will prevail because of the commitment and the effort of all of those professionals who go to work every single day securing the homeland, whether they're in the military, the CIA, Customs, FBI, the Transportation Security Administration, the Border Patrol, the Centers for Disease Control, the Coast Guard, first responders, and the list goes on and on. These men and women go to work every day. Their mission is to deal specifically with a piece of homeland security. Those are the professionals. They're going to help us win the war.

Every day, we apprehend, disarm or destroy terrorists right where they live. Every day we disrupt their networks and reduce their funding. Every day states and counties and cities become better prepared. And

when the threat level is raised, so is our level of readiness. You can count on it. That's what the professionals are trained to do and that's what they're doing. But whatever the threat level may be on any given day, every family and every citizen will know that they have done their job if they take the time to be prepared.

So the professionals take a look at that national threat warning, and it's a sign to them that they may have to vary or enhance security or preventive measures. The national threat warning is really for the security personnel and the law enforcement personnel in this country. But, regardless of the threat level, once an individual or family has been prepared, you can be assured you've done everything the country wants you to do regardless of the threat level.

The Ready Campaign will help you so you can then go about the important business, the most important business of being a family. Now the people behind this campaign, the Ad Council, the Sloan Foundation, the United States Postal Service, the Salvation Army, the Yellow Pages, the National Association of Broadcasters, they're all people you know. They know how to motivate and they know how to mobilize Americans. People you trust, such as firefighters and emergency personnel will be the messengers. The campaign will be joined by members of Congress, governors, mayors, county commissioners, the business communities, groups large and small. These groups are truly committed to this effort. In fact, many of them have joined us here today and we thank them for their tremendous work and their support of this initiative. Also assisting us are more than 300 Citizen Corps councils across this nation. We'll get the word out, and they'll help us turn these words into action.

The Ready Campaign is designed for those who want their families to be prepared but have asked us, "What can I do?"

After September 11th, many of you wrote a check, volunteered, or raised the flag. So now we're asking you to write an emergency plan, buy supplies, and hang a list of contact numbers on the wall. We cannot be complacent. Terrorists are strategic actors and they act on their timetable, not ours. They seek to turn our neighborhoods into battlefields. That is why individual citizens have such an important role to play.

Much of our population and much of our nation's critical infrastructure lies in suburban and rural America. The next attack could happen to any community at any time. The random, unpredictable nature of terrorism itself requires hopefully everyone to take our recommendations to be prepared, regardless of where they live.

So let me be very clear. Taking charge of your own safety does not mean that you're charging into this fight alone. In addition to our Ready Campaign, the Department of Homeland Security stands ready to deter and detect terrorism 24 hours a day. We've made a great deal of progress in a great many areas. Smart borders to protect our safety and our economy, tough international shipping container standards, 50,000 highly trained federal screeners at our airports, new plans to protect our physical and cyber security, the nation's first early warning network of sensors to detect a biological attack, billions of dollars to help our public health system cope with an attack. And very shortly, we will help distribute new funding to our nation's first responders to help them train and to equip to address any threat, conventional or otherwise. These funds are sorely needed and certainly long overdue.

The point of the Ready Campaign, however, is that new awareness is as important as new funding. In one newspaper last week, a man was quoted as saying, the chances of getting hit are too small. I would say to him, not small enough, ladies and gentlemen, not small enough. I hope he reconsiders his statement and at least goes home and gets prepared.

We also must avoid a sense of fatalism, the feeling that the risk is just too great, too catastrophic and we can't do anything about it. I respectfully disagree; we can do plenty about it. Governments at all levels are working on it, companies are working on it, citizens are working on it. We're doing plenty about this. We know the worst that terrorists can do and we know how to prepare to survive it, prevent it and reduce our own vulnerabilities. And we're doing it every day. America across the board is doing it every single day.

We must follow the lead of those dedicated men and women on the front lines of homeland security, who feel unease. They feel the same sense of uncertainty. But they channel that into action. Whether it's the TSA screener inspecting luggage at the airport, a border patrol officer checking trucks for explosives, a firefighter running into a burning home to save a missing loved one, these people dedicate their lives to our nation and to our safety. As citizens, we too have a commitment to make to ourselves, our families and to them. We make it by being prepared.

This is not just a response to terrorism. We truly believe it's a deterrent. In his last taped message, bin Laden

said -- I think his last videotaped message, he said something to the effect that he relies mainly on the psychological war, on fear to defeat Americans. Well, we're here to say to all terrorists that a nation of citizens who are alert and prepared, a nation of citizens who refuse to panic, well, that's a terrorist's greatest fear.

The President has asked for our prayers and our patience and our cooperation and America has responded.

Now he asks for one more thing, individuals and families to take these simple steps to be prepared. I urge all Americans to join the Ready Campaign and become part of this history-making effort.

As I said before, ladies and gentlemen, terrorists force us to make a choice. We can be afraid or we can be ready. Americans aren't afraid, and we will be ready. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

11:03 A.M. EST

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