

Secretary Tom Ridge Speaks at Drexel University in Philadelphia

Release Date: 05/24/04 00:00:00

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Drexel University
Public Policy Forum
May 24, 2004
(Remarks as Prepared)

Thank you for that introduction. The applause I get always seems to be a little bit louder when I am in Pennsylvania -- I wonder why? It's certainly nice to be home!

This is a special University, not only because of your unique curriculum, your cutting edge technology, and your world-class student body, but because of your location here in the heart of Philadelphia.

This city has such an important place in the story of our country. Not far from here, our great Founding Fathers penned both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and with them permanently affirmed our Nation's commitment to freedom, liberty, and democracy.

That makes it particularly appropriate that you have established this Public Policy Forum here at Drexel. It's an opportunity to continue to examine the state of our government -- "in order to form a more perfect union."

You've probably heard Benjamin Franklin's response to a bystander who asked him, at the close of the Constitutional Convention, whether they had gotten a Republic or a Monarchy. Franklin replied: "A Republic, if you can keep it."

Keeping it is the job of all citizens. It means taking an active role in our democratic process. It means questioning your leaders. It means improving our country -- already the greatest in the world.

The same can be said for homeland security. We each have a responsibility to take an active role in our protection.

You can develop an emergency plan with your friends and families, prepare a Ready kit, or volunteer for USA Freedom Corps or your local Citizen Corps Council.

I met last week with the Commission investigating the September 11th attacks. They have been asked to examine the lessons learned from that tragedy and recommend actions we can take to protect Americans.

I told them the same thing I have been telling audiences for many months, we are more secure today than yesterday, and we will be even more secure tomorrow than today.

You see, in the days and weeks following September 11th, the President knew, and Congress knew, and I knew, and most Americans knew, that we would have to make the full protection of our citizens, the highest charge of our Nation.

So we went to work. We called on the best and brightest minds. We sought out the most advanced technologies. We began to build and bolster security protections throughout the country.

We worked to reduce the vulnerabilities that were exploited on September 11th, and think analytically about those that could be exploited in the future.

We examined our critical infrastructure, our transportation systems, our borders, our ports, and, of course, the skies overhead. Nothing was beyond our scope of analysis.

Many of the people who made this possible are here today, homeland security directors, first responders, leaders from the community, and many more who have contributed to the protection of our homeland.

They took the challenge head-on, working together with a common vision and purpose. You can see and feel the difference they have made in ways large and small.

Before September 11th, ticket agents asked who packed a traveler's bags, but little else was done in the airport or the aircraft to provide security.

Today, we have deployed newly trained screeners and thousands of Federal air marshals, hardened cockpit doors on aircraft, and introduced state-of-the-art technologies, which, from the curb to the cockpit, have made airline travel safer.

Before September 11th, visitors at our borders faced an inspection process with distinct and disparate purposes.

Today, we have unified that process to present "one face" at the border and have deployed advanced technologies like US-VISIT, our student exchange system, and Free and Secure Trade Lanes that welcome the free flow of trade and travelers, but keep terrorists out.

US-VISIT, in particular, is using the smart technology of biometrics to speed the entry of travelers -- 4 million passengers have been processed to date, and stop criminals -- more than 400 have been apprehended or prevented from entering the country.

Before September 11th, we never looked in a container of cargo until it reached our shores, though nearly 20,000 containers arrive in our ports every single day.

Now, as I speak, there are U.S. inspectors in Rotterdam, in Singapore, in Hong Kong, and 14 other international ports of trade, working alongside our allies to target and screen cargo and ensure the safety of world commerce.

Before September 11th, our national stockpile of medications to protect Americans against a bioterrorist attack was drastically undersupplied.

Today, we have stockpiled a billion doses of antibiotics and vaccines, including enough smallpox vaccine for every man, woman, and child in America.

Before September 11th, as many here today understand, our first preventers and first responders lacked the financial resources and equipment they needed to respond together to a crisis.

And yet, today, we have allocated or awarded more than \$8 billion dollars for our state and local partners across the country and have developed new standards for interoperable communications equipment and protective gear.

Lastly, before September 11th, agencies in the Federal government saw very little need to share information and intelligence between themselves, let alone with state and local officials.

And yet, today secure communications technologies and expanded clearances, along with the shared language of the Homeland Security Advisory System, create a powerful and constant two-way flow of threat information between the Federal government and our partners across the country and around the world.

In almost every imaginable way possible, we have made a real difference in securing our people and our homeland, and there are more changes ahead. The successful integration of people and technology for a greater purpose has had a genuine result.

Thanks to new layered protections on air, land, and sea, our Nation is better protected and more secure today than we've ever been. But there is still work left. And we are going to need everyone's help to get it done.

One of the things, of course, that we are focused on at the Department is prevention. While we ready ourselves to deal with a possible attack, we will also work to develop new means to prevent one from happening at all.

One of the ways we can do that is by harnessing the creativity and ingenuity that has defined our Nation for more than two centuries, the kind you find every day here at Drexel.

In laboratories and factories, classrooms and board rooms, experts are bringing the future of research and technology to bear on the homeland security challenges we face today.

Within the Department of Homeland Security, our Office for Science and Technology is specifically tasked with marshalling the intellectual capital of the academic, engineering, and scientific communities to develop fresh and effective approaches to safeguarding the American public.

S&T is the primary research and development arm of the Department. Our experts are looking to partner with both the public and private sectors, including universities such as Drexel, to find solutions to meet our most pressing needs.

Some of you might be familiar with the Homeland Security Advanced Research Projects Agency (HSARPA), which is part of our S&T division. They are developing the most innovative technologies to help us meet our mission.

Specifically, two research projects currently underway through HSARPA are biological sensors that can either "detect-to-treat" or "detect-to-protect." The first analyzes biological threat agents on location across a large area, and would give medical first responders important information within three hours to help quickly treat patients.

The second system has a trigger sensor that makes it possible to accurately identify a biological attack on a building in less than two minutes, allowing the building to automatically shift or stop air flows to limit inhalation.

The projects we are exploring through HSARPA comprise just one part of our overall strategy to make industry and

academic contributions an important part of homeland security.

In every area of human endeavor, research and development is the engine that drives our nation to a better and brighter future.

R&D at NASA brought us incredible pictures of the surface of Mars. R&D at the Department of Energy is helping to bring hydrogen-powered cars to our roadways. And R&D at the Department of Homeland Security will bring new protections, those unimagined even today, to our shores and seaports, borders and buildings.

But government can't do it alone. Contrary to what some believe, all knowledge does not reside in Washington, D.C. In so many areas, the government collaborates with academics, businesses, and scientists to produce together what would be impossible individually.

The Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity could not have landed without the Jet Propulsion Lab at California Institute of Technology. Hydrogen powered cars will not clean our air without the participation, in fact the leadership, of auto manufacturers and consumers. And our Department is relying on everyone here at Drexel, and the entire academic community, to boost our efforts to develop an enduring national research capability in homeland protection.

That is our aim with the Homeland Security Scholars and Fellows Program. This opportunity is open to students interested in pursuing areas of study that can lead to scientific and technological innovations applicable to the homeland security mission.

Already, the first class of 100 scholars, both undergraduate and graduate students, is engaged in fields of study ranging from social science and psychology to engineering and the life sciences.

The Department is also establishing University-based Homeland Security Centers of Excellence that will be dedicated to preventing terrorist strikes and minimizing the consequences of an attack. Each center will have a different research focus.

The first, at the University of Southern California, will assess the level of risk associated with various terrorist scenarios, as well as their potential economic consequences.

And we recently announced that Texas A&M University and the University of Minnesota have been chosen to lead two new centers on agro-security. Specifically, Texas A&M will lead the way on studies of foreign animal diseases. And Minnesota will be focused on securing our food supply from possible attack.

These are all examples of people coming together around a shared idea, and the shared responsibility of protecting our homeland.

The British political thinker Edmund Burke once noted that "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil...is for good men to do nothing."

Certainly, there is plenty for all Americans to do to prevent the triumph of evil terrorists. And we have. We have made progress in securing our country, and we will continue to work hard every day to improve our protections.

Homeland security is about the integration of a nation, everyone pledged to freedom's cause, everyone its protector, and everyone its beneficiary.

It's about the integration of people and technology to make us smarter, safer, more sophisticated, and better protected.

It's about the integration of our national efforts, not one department or one organization, but everyone tasked with our country's protection.

Every day, we work to make America more secure. Every day, the memories of September 11th inspire us to live our vision of preserving our freedoms, enjoying our liberties, protecting America, and securing the homeland.

Thank you for your contributions. And thank you for having me here today.