

Secretary Tom Ridge on the One-Year Anniversary of the Department of Homeland Security

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Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

I also want to thank Frank Cilluffo and the George Washington Homeland Security Policy Institute for hosting this special event. What a wonderful place to commemorate this moment ... at an institution named for George W. It's always good to plug the Boss. In this case, another great "George W" -- one of our nation's most revered presidents ... and of course, one of our great Founding Fathers.

An ideal must have a champion. And in the Founding Fathers, freedom had many. America, as we know, was originally designed by a monarchy. But the founders rallied a people around a common destiny -- liberty, opportunity, and self-rule. Together, they met the challenge of challenging times ... broke free from a king and an empire ... and set the course of a new nation. And when the victory had been won, George Washington declared, liberty was "finally staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people."

Washington understood: freedom's greatest companion is fellowship -- unity, the integration of a nation, everyone pledged to freedom's cause, everyone its protector. It wasn't enough to create the building blocks of a free society. Freedom had to be an unyielding principle bound to every human heart and mind -- so strong that it would endure so that we as a nation would endure, so deeply felt that, through its grace and guidance, future generations of Americans would feel it, too, and could meet the challenge of challenging times. And we have.

Despite revolutions, a Civil War, two World Wars, the assassinations of Presidents, despite terrible, soul-wrenching catastrophes ... the blessings of freedom and our way of life have endured. And yet, as a nation, we know that we will always be tested. Just as we are now, in this, perhaps the greatest test of our times.

On September 11, 2001, moments after the Twin Towers fell, and the Pentagon burned, and the passengers of Flight 93 made their heroic goodbyes -- we knew. The task ahead would be daunting; the terrorists were determined. But our determination was greater. Our resolve was stronger. Our response, swift. And our message, clear: Do not take from us our loved ones, and expect us to linger in grief. Expect us to come after you ... and do all we can to keep you from harming our country and our citizens again. Freedom has its home here ... and our fellowship is strong.

I have known our President for a long time. He is a remarkable man, a President who keeps near the badge of a fallen police officer who died at the World Trade Center; a President who, after 9-11, quickly understood that the tools and tactics and theories of old wars would not apply to this new one. He knew that we needed a new way to win a new war against a new kind of enemy, and that we needed it fast. And so, he exercised bold leadership, the right leadership, when he, along with Congress, moved at lightning speed by Washington standards to make Homeland Security a new Cabinet Department.

Homeland Security: A Year of Accomplishments

In the space of one year, the men and women of this new Department have achieved a great deal to secure this country. There was much to be done:

So immediately, we reorganized our border functions in a way that established better morale, improved service, shorter delays and tighter security. We also unified our border inspection process to accelerate the free flow of goods and people ... and to keep terrorists and criminals out.

For decades, the idea behind some form of entry-exit system languished. In eight short months, we turned idea into action, coupled it with the "smart technology" of biometrics, and created a system that, in adding 15 seconds to a traveler's journey ... also adds greater convenience and peace of mind.

As many of you know, we took immediate and extensive measures to enhance aviation security. In less than a year, we deployed newly trained screeners, thousands of federal air marshals and state-of-the-art technologies, which, from the curb to the cockpit, have made airline travel safer.

We also looked at SEVIS -- retooled it, and by last fall semester, had a new system in place that now ensures that foreign students are not delayed upon entry -- and that those posing as students, seeking entry to fraudulent schools, are stopped in their tracks. Last fall almost 300,000 students were successfully cleared for study at our institutions of

higher education. Those 200, who attempted entry, but were not registered at any school, were sent home.

In less than 12 months, we significantly expanded the nation's container security initiative, known as CSI. The result: as we gather today, there is an inspector in Rotterdam, in Singapore, in Hong Kong, and 14 other ports of trade, working alongside our allies to inspect and secure the nearly 20,000 containers of cargo that arrive at our shores every day.

Additionally, amid the disasters wrought by Hurricane Isabel, California wildfires, the August blackout, and the worst tornado season in years, the hard work of early preparation meant greater coordination with state and local authorities, faster deployment of resources and manpower -- so that assistance was available and ready to turnaround at a moment's notice.

In our first year, we also moved quickly to stand up a new program, Operation Predator, which has resulted in the arrest of more than 2,000 child sex offenders since its launch just a little more than seven months ago.

Also, we swore in record numbers of new citizens, legitimate immigrants who now share a common experience -- freedom -- and an opportunity to obtain their version of the American dream.

That's part of the story. By adding secure communication technologies and expanded security clearances with our state and local partners, and coupling that with the shared language of the Homeland Security Advisory system, we created a powerful and constant two-way flow of information. Since March 1 of last year, we also have allocated or awarded a record \$8 billion to states, regions and cities to help train and equip our nation's dedicated first responders. We launched the Ready Campaign and expanded Citizen Corps to 900 communities. This one-two punch for engaging individual Americans is the most widespread citizen preparedness effort every undertaken.

We also established our first Center of Excellence and our first class of Homeland Security Scholars and Fellows -- to foster new thinking, new capabilities and new career paths, so essential to the fight against terrorism, as this fight moves into the future.

Among many more achievements, we made great progress in this new merger of 180,000 people and 22 agencies, what has amounted to a full-scale government divestiture, merger, acquisition and startup, all at once ... and, undoubtedly, the biggest "change management" challenge of all time.

Yes, it has been quite an undertaking. But it has been driven by a sense of urgency and national importance unprecedented in modern times ... and resulted in a country more secure and better prepared than it has ever been before. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of our first year was that we had to stand up a department -- meaning consolidate systems, integrate servers, get a stapler on every desk. But, also and foremost, we at all times had to be squarely focused on strengthening and extending the depth and breadth of our nation's protective measures ... to think and act in a bold, broad, brand new 21st-century way.

Initially, necessity compelled us to take a first-things-first approach -- to carry out the guidelines set out by the President in his National Strategy. But, I'm pleased to report, that within this year, we also completed the Department's first high-level Strategic Plan -- which includes a vision, mission, and strategic goals and objectives that provide the framework for the tactics we will use to carry out daily operations.

And so, today, 180,000 people are compelled by a new vision and rally around it. That vision -- one of preserving our freedoms and protecting America -- will shape the accomplishments we celebrate next year at this time, and many years into this future. The preservation of our freedoms comes first in our vision statement because that is, after all, the very essence of who we are -- of what the Founding Fathers fought for -- of what protecting America is all about. After all, you do not defend liberty to forsake it. And so, in everything we do to enhance security, we do ... so that our individual liberties, protections, privacy and collective freedoms will endure.

Equally important, this Department has a clear mission statement -- specifically, that we will lead the unified national effort to secure America. We will prevent and deter terrorist attacks and protect against and respond to threats and hazards to the nation. We will ensure safe and secure borders, but also keep open doors so emblematic of, and essential to, this welcoming and economically thriving nation.

Let me state clearly. Homeland Security is a national strategy. The attacks of 9-11 required a whole new philosophy of how we secure the country, a philosophy of shared responsibility, shared leadership, shared accountability -- and that engenders a shared imperative ... in essence, a new commitment to federalism.

Washington can be expected to lead, but we cannot, nor should not, micro-manage the protection of an entire nation. Instead, it must be a priority in every city, every neighborhood, and every home across America. And so, perhaps more than anything, homeland security in the 21st century is about the integration of a nation, and nations -- led by national leaders, but also governors, mayors, county executives, tribal leaders, airline personnel, border patrol agents, the intelligence community, law enforcement, firefighters, diplomatic officers, business leaders, international partners --

citizens and freedom-loving people everywhere.

The Way Ahead

The next year for the Department will be an important one.

We will challenge our employees and our partners to take their commitment and already extraordinary efforts to the next level -- so that we can further expand and push a vast agenda for a truly strategic homeland security effort -- so that we can lay the foundation of homeland security for future years.

We know there is much more to do. But in anything you do, you have to set priorities. You have to allocate resources to meet pressing needs ... and drive the fundamentals. And so, today, I am laying down the markers for 2004 ... and the time frames in which we will achieve them. And with each priority, I add a call to action to our employees, and our partners, and citizens, to work with us to achieve these goals. As it was in Washington's time, so it is in ours. When it comes to the preservation of freedom and the protection of our country -- *we are equal to its responsibilities; we are all equal to the task.*

And a year from now, I invite you to come back, grade us -- see if performance met the goals -- and know that, over the course of the next calendar year, we will be giving these goals everything we have.

Stronger Information Sharing and Infrastructure Protection

Before this Department, our country's most historic treasures and important structures were surrounded only by awe-struck tourists and, in some cases, a good fence. Yet, in our first year, Homeland Security created a brand new capability that has become essential. We have established a unique, integrated threat and vulnerability assessment process to map threat information against the nation's critical infrastructure. That's important -- because we are all concerned about the safety of our food and water supply, the power plants that run energy to our homes and our children's schools.

We want to know that it's okay to pass over or through the bridges, tunnels, roads and subways that we take to work. We need to know that our oil refineries, chemical and nuclear facilities have a security presence -- visible and undercover -- and that each retains the watchful eye of everyone from local law enforcement to the National Guard to the private sector businesses that own 85 percent of these entities.

In 2004, we will dig deeper into our efforts -- specifically, work in greater tandem with the private sector to strengthen vertical communication systems and significantly increase permanent protections around our nation's most vital assets. The goal is to maximize real-time sharing of situational information -- without delay, and with full throttle distribution of intelligence to those in the field who need to act on it.

We'll carry out this shared effort by instituting several new capabilities:

We will secure real-time nationwide connectivity between all 50 states and territories. This will mean multi-directional information sharing -- the first phase of which, cyber-connectivity, will be completed within the next three months. Most notably, this is a system driven from the bottom up ... and brought to us as a communication tool because our state and local partners developed it and wanted it. I want to thank them and the Defense Intelligence Agency for their hard work and team effort. We'll also build on existing programs to share many different types of information and dramatically augment the Department's technical backbone to strengthen this connectivity.

Let me add that we will also complete the installation of secure videoconferencing capabilities to all governors' offices by July 2004, which will allow greater and much-needed dissemination of classified information to homeland security professionals around the country.

Now we know, as do our partners, that vast, rich information sharing tools are critical to our ability to keeping our nation's critical infrastructure far from a terrorist's reach. And so, I'm announcing today that, by December of this year, together with our partners, we will create a unified, national critical infrastructure database that will enable us to identify our greatest points of vulnerability, existing levels of security and then add increased measures of protection where needed.

As part of this effort, we will be working with private sector partners to develop standards by which to measure vulnerabilities and the actions needed to correct them. These standards will be implemented at all levels, in keeping with our national strategy. In effect, together with our partners, we will establish benchmarks that will incent and engage our partners to get the job done.

Our private sector partners should know -- the citizens of this country rely on you for your resources -- but they depend on you, too, for their protection. And so does this Administration. We cannot achieve all we need to achieve as a nation alone. We are partners. And as such, we need you, and expect you, to take the initiative, as so many of you have rightly done, to strengthen the security of your facilities ... with your dollars and with your determination. It is what

we must ask of everyone -- to make the fullest protection of this nation, the highest charge of all.

Standards for Interoperable Communications and Equipment

Many of us know that part of the tragedy of September 11th was that equipment didn't work across jurisdictions and disciplines.

Fire department radios couldn't transmit to police department radios. Firefighters rushing in from other cities and even neighborhoods were, in some cases, unable to assist because the couplings that attach "hoses to hydrants" simply wouldn't fit; they weren't compatible. Our first responders are first on the scene and, they'll tell you, they're often the last to leave; their ability to communicate and work with each other in the event of a crisis is paramount ... and their inability to do so is a long-standing, complex and critical issue facing this nation. And so, we all must work together to give them the tools to do their jobs -- in a way that replaces outdated, outmoded relics with an interoperable, innovative and integrated system.

There are immediate steps the department can take while we focus on long-term, integrated solutions. Already, for example, the Department has identified technical specifications for a baseline interoperable communication system.

If adopted at the state and local level, by the end of 2004, most first responders will have a way to communicate with each other during a crisis, regardless of frequency or mode of communication. Over the course of the year, we will also issue new standards for major pieces of compatible equipment -- such as basic protective gear and clothing.

We'll also create a coordinated grant integration web portal that, along with grant information, will provide collaborative tools and other relevant information to promote interoperability at all levels.

But let me emphasize: we want to ensure that when federal money is spent, it fosters interoperability. So, while these immediate steps will begin to build a foundation for longer-term efforts -- longer-term efforts will require a national solution.

And a national solution will require actionable results at the state and local level -- in other words, a resolve not to let an incompatible radio frequency or a too-small/too-large piece of safety equipment impede the ability of brave men and women to save the lives of citizens ... as well as their own. We need to coordinate this effort together. A truly nationwide interoperable system demands leadership at all levels. And so, I'm grateful and quite pleased that many of our state and local partners have already demonstrated this leadership, and made this vital issue a key priority in their states and in their cities.

Integrated Border and Port Security Systems

Today, as we have every day since March 1 of last year, we patrol 95,000 miles of shoreline and navigable waters ... and 7,500 miles of land border with Canada and Mexico.

Every year, more than 500 million people, 130 million motor vehicles, 2 .5 million railcars, and more than 11 million containers are processed at the border. U.S. overseas trade passes through our country's 300-plus ports.

The challenge of developing a fully integrated border and port security system, in the context of a global economy, amid a global war, is great. And yet, the consequences of not achieving this goal are even greater.

Last year, we established a firm base of border and port security protective measures. In the next 12 months, we'll broaden and enhance those security measures even further, while continuing to facilitate legitimate commerce across borders.

We'll do this in a number of ways -- by installing US-VISIT at our 50 busiest land ports of entry and 7 more FAST lanes, bringing the total to 18 locations, deploying aerial surveillance and sensor technology, expanding CSI to 10 additional high-volume ports, and working with the private sector to facilitate compliance and assessment of new maritime security regulations. It's a layered, risk-based and certainly "all-hands" approach. As the president has said, "Our enemies are not idle, and neither are we." And so I ask all of our partners -- our international counterparts, state and local authorities and private businesses -- to engage in this important effort.

More Prepared Communities

Citizens are just as integral in combating terrorism as any state and local government or private company. For terrorism is insidious. Terrorists seek to infiltrate our society, scope out targets, and wage war in our streets and cities.

Of all the titles conveyed on so many of our Founding Fathers -- Soldier, Hero, President, Statesman -- the title they cherished above all else was that of Citizen. For, in the fight for independence, that was the title to which these great men risked their lives to achieve. And so, to mount a national march toward an integrated and seamless degree of protection, it's vital that we continue to reach out to our citizens and empower them to play a direct role in securing their families and their communities.

For our part, over the next year, Homeland Security will focus its efforts on raising the baseline level of preparedness across the nation. We know, of course, that terrorists can strike anywhere, the unpredictable nature of terrorism that is so daunting ... so all communities need some level of assistance to increase their preparedness. And yet, as we all understand, certain regions are more target-rich, so they need extra support.

This approach was already part of the distribution of our first-year funding. But in the next year, we'll strengthen this good strategy further using an even more focused application of federal resources -- meaning that we will use more than just population to distribute grants.

We will, instead, apply an approach that considers important criteria such as population density, nearby critical infrastructure and a more-focused assessment of threat. Within weeks, we will develop and deliver standardized incident management protocols and procedures within communities -- ones that will allow first responders, in communities large and small, to receive the same training under our nation's National Response Plan.

We want to examine as many ways as possible to broaden communication and coordinate actions, so that when people show up at an incident, they're not meeting for the first time; they're not confused about the chain of command; and they're not lacking for help in their communities as they scramble to aid and assist our citizens in the midst of a crisis.

The Department of Homeland Security is an all-hazards agency. And, as such, we will continue to educate the public about the importance of being prepared for all emergencies, whether wrought by disaster or design. Our goal over the next year will be to accelerate the basic level of citizen preparedness across the nation. Current research suggests that between 20 to 30 percent of Americans have an emergency supply kit and that 15 percent have a communications plan.

Our desire is that nearly half of all Americans, in some form or combination, will be better prepared by the end of 2004 -- whether that's by preparing family Ready kits and emergency plans; volunteering to aid in disaster planning; or engaging in CPR and training exercises to help someone in a life-threatening situation.

To help push this forward-leaning agenda, by the end of 2004, we will add to the strength of our existing Ready campaign by launching two new citizen preparedness endeavors -- Ready for Business and Ready for Schools. We will also continue to work with third party organizations, such as The American Red Cross and America Prepared -- and, of course, Citizen Corps. Citizen Corps' mission is to encourage everyone to participate in making America safer; their councils, which have nearly tripled in number since 9-11, and have helped us deliver the Ready message at the grassroots level ... the level where it's needed most.

New Technologies and Tools

Every day we must operate with the knowledge that our enemies are changing based on how we change. As we shore up one vulnerability, they work to uncover another. This is why science and technology is key to winning this new kind of war. The work we do at Homeland Security, in partnership with the private sector, national laboratories, universities and research centers, help us push the scientific envelope. It helps drive the development and use of high technology to combat the weapons of high consequence. New tools of analysis, information sharing and detection help us counter terrorist attacks -- before they can happen -- and if they happen, minimize their impact.

And so, over the year, Homeland Security will be "buttoning up our lab coats" a little higher -- and committing to specific goals: developing new capabilities for detecting the presence of nuclear materials in shipping containers and vehicles. And developing next generation of biological and chemical detectors, ones uniquely sensitive enough to redirect air flow to allow evacuation of buildings, if a dangerous pathogen is detected.

Both capabilities are critical to a war where speed of knowledge and action is vital to the protection of the public. And yet, we know that Homeland Security can't drive these advances. Only science can. But together with our partners, I assure you, we will take up the charge to secure our country, using the latest technologies available to keep America safe and free.

Improved Customer Service at Immigration Services

Another key priority of this department will be to improve and protect immigration practices. Again, it is part of our mission, to secure our country, but also to ensure that we remain a welcoming nation for people who want a better way of life and who want to make a contribution here. America, after all, is a nation of immigrants, with good-hearted, productive, law-abiding citizens originating everywhere from Beijing to Belgrade, from Nairobi to New Delhi.

I'm proud to say that, more than 227 years ago, from my home state of Pennsylvania, came the assurance that America would always be a diverse nation, where all people, from all parts of the world, could come to a land where freedom transcends all else. It is the President's intention, and that of the Department's, that this founding principle must and always will endure.

Citizenship has long been among the most important privileges this nation can bestow. And, as the Department that oversees this critical function, we are committed to making the immigration and naturalization process a welcoming and timely one.

And so, over the next year, we will focus our efforts on several pilot programs aimed at reducing the backlog of pending cases and streamlining the citizenship process. You have my pledge that progress will be made to accelerate the careful screening and processing of visa and green card applications, reduce the current backlog of applications, educate prospective citizens about e-filing initiatives implemented last year and, overall, institute a policy of improved customer service. And we will do this, as we do in anything we undertake as a Department -- always with an eye toward protecting the privacy and civil liberties of everyone involved.

Build a 21st Century Department

Since September 11th, our world has changed. America has changed. But much of what is important remains the same. America is still a welcoming nation that opens her borders to citizens from all over the world. Our promise still rests on a respect for the vast diversity of people and cultures that enrich our lives -- and America's way of life.

Freedom is still the enduring principle that calls us together -- just as our Founding Fathers would want it to be.

As a Department, we have made measurable, visible progress during our first year of work. But today we go forward -- to ensure the momentum we have established, to sustain and expand our first year successes and to develop new means to defend and protect our great country.

We're building a department that strikes out to create the model government agency for the 21st century. And in a 21st century threat environment, nothing less will do.

I am quite proud of the men and women of this Department. They are indeed doing freedom's hard work. What motivates them is what motives us all, 29 months after a difficult September morning.

The images of 9-11 resonate deep within -- citizens running up burning flights of stairs, citizens risking their lives to aid those who were trapped, citizens rushing the cockpit of Flight 93, knowing, knowing, they would never pass our way again.

There is the old maxim: strength in numbers. And perhaps, if there is anything we gained from 9-11, it was the collective understanding of the most basic of principles: That freedom's greatest companion is fellowship, unity -- the integration of a nation, everyone pledged to freedom's cause, everyone its protector.

We are a people, both determined and self-determining. We know, now more than ever: our responsibilities to one another must reach from a national crisis to an individual need. They must extend from community to community, neighbor to neighbor, citizen to citizen, in a nation that is, in itself, the greatest community ever formed.

I'm quite grateful for the resolve and responsibility shown by all of our partners. And I ask that we continue to work together -- fully, as a nation -- as we face the great challenge of challenging times.

I know that we will, just as surely as our Founding Fathers knew that we would. Because, let no one question, an ideal must have a champion. And in these United States, freedom has many. Freedom has its home here ... and our fellowship is strong.

Thank you.