

## Remarks by Secretary Ridge at Chicago TOPOFF Press Conference

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Thank you, Governor Blagojevich. Good afternoon. On Monday of this week, the Department of Homeland Security launched a five-day, full-scale national exercise in Chicago and Seattle to measure and analyze our nation's response to a mock terrorist attack.

Let me start off by complimenting Mayor Daley and Governor Blagojevich for the strong leadership they have provided to the people of Chicago during these exercises. The City of Chicago has an excellent reputation in the preparedness community, and we appreciate the City's willingness to test these capabilities before a national audience. Although a thorough analysis of the exercises will be done in the coming weeks, I am pleased to say that our initial assessment is that the City has performed well under the difficult circumstances it was presented with over the past few days.

The TOPOFF exercises are an important part of our national preparedness strategy. If we are going to make our response system stronger, we first have to identify where strengths and weaknesses exist. That is what TOPOFF is designed to do. These challenging scenarios forced us to gauge our readiness, test our internal communications, and reinforce relationships.

There have been hundreds of men and women who have invested countless hours into creating and implementing the TOPOFF exercises. Although I have been monitoring and actively participating in the exercises back in Washington, today I have been able to see first hand how these fictitious tragedies are playing out on the ground. My visits to the Strategic National Stockpile Distribution Center, the Joint Information Center/Joint Operations Center and the 911 Center have demonstrated deeply thorough, nimble and responsive coordination capabilities among our emergency preparedness and response authorities.

Throughout the week, we have been able to test several of the critical capabilities that are key to handling large scale disasters in an efficient manner. For example we looked at functions such as:

- The National Threat Advisory System - especially the steps we would take to go to Red nationwide if this attack had been real
- Internal Decision Making Methods - specifically when and how to deploy federal resources, such as special CDC teams, FEMA and Hazardous Material support personnel.
- Stakeholder Communication - particularly with State and Local Officials on critical decisions
- Public Health System - focusing on the distribution of the Strategic National Stockpile and the utilization of area hospitals
- Technical Expertise - how to quickly harness experts to provide health and safety guidance after an attack has occurred

We will be doing a thoughtful and careful analysis of every aspect of this exercise so that we can learn as much as possible from the activities that have taken place here. Members of the private sector, as well as local, state and international communities, will be providing valuable input into a thorough process that examines every aspect of our emergency response system. This group will be particularly happy to know that we even simulated distribution of information to a fictitious media outlet to test our ability to provide timely and accurate information to the public. This too will be analyzed in our final report.

As with the first TOPOFF exercise, held three years ago, we hope TOPOFF 2 will provide us with concrete examples of how we can better respond to attacks. Because, while we're doing everything we can to prevent, deter and disrupt terrorist activity, we have to be prepared to respond to any real life scenario that might occur.

To that end, I'm very pleased to announce that yesterday we made an additional \$700 million dollars from the

FY '03 Supplemental Budget available to major urban areas throughout the United States, including New York City, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago and others. Chicago, itself, will receive approximately \$29 million in grant monies. And let me clarify, this announcement is not part of any exercise; this money is real.

These much-needed funds will enable these urban areas to provide additional resources that are so vital to their dedicated first responders. The release of this funding takes into account threats, population density and the presence of critical infrastructure. All of this helps to secure our homeland in an environment where we must ensure that maximum benefit is derived from every security dollar.

I'd like to thank you all for your great coverage of TOPOFF 2. We know that this exercise will show us the way forward - allowing us to rise to a new level of readiness each and every day. And I have every confidence that, ultimately, we will be a nation, stronger and more secure, because of it.

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