



Remarks by Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge at a Press Conference Announcing the National Response Plan

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Thanks, Ray. It's nice to be back in the NGA headquarters. We did a lot of work together, nearly seven years of - I tell all my friends that governor is one of the greatest political jobs in the American political system. I was governor for six years, nine months and five days. I loved every minute of it, and enjoyed working, not only the personal relationships, but the networking opportunities we had as governors, Republicans and Democrats, to get things done on behalf of America. And from time to time, obviously, within the NGA, because of our democratic system, there were differences of opinion as to -- not necessarily -- rarely a difference of opinion with regard to priorities, but how you get there. And it's a beautiful thing to be able to say that this document that we're talking about today, this integration of capability around America is not about politics. Everybody agrees, federal, state and local level, Republic and Democrat, independent, that this is what we need to do to make ourselves safer and more secure in the future.

So no better place than -- to introduce it publicly than at the National Governors Association because it's a new paradigm, it's a new model, it's a new kind of federalism, when it comes to Homeland Security. We all have different capacities that we bring to the -- our responsibility to protect our citizens and to make America a safer place.

So, Ray, I thank you very much. It's good to be back. I have a list of a couple names here of people that I wanted to recognize that helped write that document, and they've all been struck, because the people I recognize out there, I know by name -- I've got an appointment at four and I want to get to it.

So distinguished guests all, and frankly, just about everybody seated in this room, either personally or through their organization, has been involved in building the National Response Plan. So it's -- I thank you for being here and for working so hard to make today's announcement possible. And I look forward to speaking to you privately after these remarks.

My experience as a governor is one of the many reasons I'm very, very enthusiastic about the completion of one of the Department of Homeland Security's key priorities. It's one of the top goals for the security of our nation, and that's the creation of a National -- not a federal -- a National Response Plan. I think we all understand how important it is to work together. There's a lot of lip service that's given to that notion at all levels of government, but at every level of government and throughout the public and private sector, we know that there's no more important time to work together than to meet our responsibilities to do everything we can to prevent an attack, to detect an attack, to deter an attack, to respond and recover if one occurs.

Now, in the event of a crisis, whether an attack of man or of Mother Nature, it's critical that our response as a country be quick, coordinated, and comprehensive. Halfway around the world, we've recently experienced the violent swings of nature in epic proportions. The tsunami in southeastern Asia has tested not only the response capabilities of the world community, but also has revealed the compassion of the world community. And it has reinforced in each of us in this country, and I dare say around the world, a sense of how fragile a place we live in on this planet. Our thoughts and prayers and, clearly, our help, are with the millions of people and the many countries who have been affected by this disaster.

And much like the September 11th terrorist attacks, and others from Baghdad to Beslan, this is a global tragedy that we're witnessing being unveiled and brought to us by Mother Nature. It's a global tragedy with countless

dead and injured and displaced from countries all around the world. With a global tragedy comes a global response, and the recovery efforts underway have shown that we are indeed one people. That kind of unity is what we're aiming for with the National Response Plan here in the United States of America. This new roadmap for response and recovery efforts embodies our nation's commitment to the concept of one team, one goal -- a safer and more secure America.

In Washington, plans and reports, thick volumes all, get issued quite frequently, with regard to how you deal with incidents like this, and in some cases, the only way you could really keep safe is if you actually took those volumes and built a wall. The National Response Plan, we think, is a lot different. Instead of promising results in the future, it is a deliverable that we believe will bring definite results now.

America is better prepared today, thanks to the National Response Plan. That's why we made it one of our top goals and worked so hard to achieve it. And of course, the Department of Homeland Security did not, and the federal government did not do it alone. The results are tangible and meaningful, because we've engaged our partners in the process. It's one of the hallmarks, from my perspective, of our Department.

It is a new day in a post-9/11 world, and our response as a new Department is to build on the relationships we have with the states and the locals and the tribes and the private sector, because only when we take advantage of all the capacity, be it people and technology, and all the ability, and all the training, and all the experience all around the country, do we maximize our own ability as a country to be as strong and as secure and as safe as we possibly can. And we have worked with experts and practitioners from across the country, across disciplines and across traditional barriers, to fuse, to pull together a comprehensive all-hazards approach to managing domestic incidents. Many of you have heard me time again, and perhaps some of you think even ad nauseam, when I say one of the extraordinary things about America historically is when we have been confronted with a challenge, we respond quickly, we do so successfully, but in the process of building a response, we end up being a safer, better and stronger country because of it.

The effort that we're putting into this and the dollars we're putting into this is because of 9/11, but as you saw by that video, if we do it right, and we have to do it right, we'll not only be safer and more security against a potential terrorist attack, but also against manmade disasters, criminal events, Mother Nature. So again, we'll respond effectively, but in the process, be a better and stronger country because of it.

Everyone had a seat at the drafting table: governors and mayors, law enforcement officers and firefighters, emergency managers, public health workers, security and public works professionals. And many of those partners are here to join us today for this announcement. And understandably, I hope you're very proud of your contributions, and I hope you're eager to put this plan into action as soon as possible.

Basically, the National Response Plan establishes a brand new way of doing business. It's an all-hazard, multi-disciplined, cross-jurisdictional way of standardized, predictable practices and procedures for federal governments to work with the state and the local and tribal governments in the private sector to protect the nation.

The document truly brings the country together, to prevent, prepare for, and respond to major acts of terrorism, as we confront a determined, adaptive and creative adversary.

The sense of engagement and coordination will unify the team that will be charged with responding to potential terrorist attacks or natural disasters. The plan is a comprehensive roadmap for everyone to follow, not only to react to terrorist attacks, I reiterate, but prevent them from happening in the first place. And in doing so, it will help save lives, protect public health and the environment, ensure the maximum safety for people and property and limit the disruptions to our way of life. It gets everyone involved in response and recovery, and it gets them all involved on the same page, whether that page covers a terrorism event, a tornado, or a myriad of events in between.

And you must know that as of today, I think at two-thirty, online we have the first training module that's available for people outside the beltway and inside the beltway. There's a training module. You access it and we test you on what you've learned with the training module. Bob Stephen and his integration team and the Emergency Management Institute at Emmitsburg and our great friends in other agencies who have been around working with our federal partners, and we're going to move out swiftly to take this concept to the six largest urban areas in America.

So we've got a lot of work to do, but already, there's been a lot of infrastructure built and outreach delivered, and we're going to use the 21st century world, the cyber-world, to help educate and keep people educated on it as well.

In the past, I've referred to the National Response Plan as a playbook. It makes sure that the quarterback -- obviously, I'm going to use a football metaphor, because the road to the Super Bowl is through either Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, or both. Anyhow. (Laughter.) Still a governor, Ray.

We make sure that the playbook includes the quarterback, the wide receivers and the offensive line. They all know how to get to the end zone together, don't they? Well, some teams do. But if football isn't your game, it's like a sheet music for an orchestra, or the script on a movie set. And beyond metaphors, though, the National Response Plan is about the integration of our nation around the ideals of Homeland Security. Everyone has a job to do; you've heard me say that before and I'll say it again, even when I no longer hold this post. Homeland Security is about the integration of a country; it's not just about a federal department. It's the integration of the ability and the capacity to protect ourselves, to defend ourselves and to make all of us more secure. And to that end, everybody -- everybody has a job to do. We can't do them as individuals. We do have to work together, shared goals, shared responsibility and, therefore, shared results and success.

This is an historic and unique document, and I say this again from my perspective as a governor. The notion that the federal government many, many times is very prescriptive, mandating what the states and the locals are supposed to do; this is not a mandate. This is an agreement. This is an agreement between the state and the locals and the federal government, between the Cabinet secretaries and their agencies who are all signatories, the agreement that this is what we can, should and will do together. It's a rather unique document that integrates not only the spirit, but the commitment of an entire country. It's this kind of spirit that has defined our country for more than two centuries, everyone pledged to freedom's cause, everyone its beneficiary and, therefore, everyone accepting the role as being freedom's protector.

Many of freedom's protectors are here today, and have been with us during every step of this process. And I would like to again thank them for giving so much to the -- so much effort to the success of this initiative and this project. Together, we have achieved a great deal for our fellow citizens. America will be safer because of your efforts, and because of your ability to come together to develop this National Response Plan that we began as of today, two-thirty, online, to reach out and implement across the nation, down to the local level.

So, again, my public acknowledgment and recognition of all of your work, you personally and your organizations, and thank you for helping us, helping the Department reach one of its most significant and important goals in a timely fashion.

Now that we've got the plan, it's our collective responsibility to go out and implement it, so that in the event something happens, we get it right, and this is a plan that will make sure that we get it right.

Thanks very much.

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