

Testimony of

The Honorable Tom Ridge

March 4, 2003

Mr. Chairman, Senator Leahy, distinguished members of the committee. It is a distinct pleasure and privilege to appear before you today in what is my first opportunity to testify before the Congress as the Secretary of Homeland Security. I appreciate the opportunity to appear with my colleagues, the Attorney General and FBI Director Mueller, two distinguished public servants, and two of my closest allies in the ongoing campaign to enhance the safety and security of our American Homeland. Thank you for this opportunity to highlight the activities and accomplishments of the Department of Homeland Security over the brief 40 days since we came into being. I hope also to talk about ongoing efforts, and address future plans within the Department.

To say it has been a busy six weeks at DHS would be a profound understatement. The men and women of the Department have been, and still are, pressing forward with skill, tenacity and clear understanding of the importance of the work they do. As a result of their efforts, I am proud to say that what was little more than a bold idea and an ambitious legislative undertaking four months ago is now a real and functioning Department.

Last Saturday, the first of March, 2003, we integrated nearly two dozen agencies or entities into the Department of Homeland Security. With them came some 180,000 dedicated Federal workers who have all been serving their country with distinction from various departments within the government. This momentous milestone means that there is now real muscle on the skeleton of a department that was created back in January. With these agencies and these people come tremendous capabilities, as well as challenges. We are a Department that must now set about the business of melding this collection of capable but diverse organizations into a cohesive, effective and efficient team. And we must do it without losing focus, for even an instant, on the critical mission that is ours.

But we have not simply been waiting for March 1 to arrive. Since January we have undertaken a number of initiatives to enhance our Homeland Security today, and into the future.

In order to better protect our borders, Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson, with my strong support, has launched a well conceived and much needed plan to combine the forces of the Customs Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the agricultural inspection functions of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the Federal Protective Service. His initiative, based on the vision articulated in the Homeland Security Act, combines the four entities into two, a Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, and a Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This is an important step that will leverage the operational expertise of all those involved and move us toward a future where there will be one organizational face at our borders, instead of the current three. This realignment of resources has already demonstrated its benefit. Last week, customs, immigration and agriculture border inspectors reported to three separate port

directors who in turn reported up separate chains of command to three separate cabinet secretaries. Today, these inspectors now report to one interim port director, who reports through a unified chain of command, to one cabinet Secretary.

Two weeks ago we rolled out the Department's Citizen Preparedness program. The public response has been overwhelming, with our ready.gov website receiving more than 2.5 million visits per day since becoming operational. This program provides immediate and practical guidance to the millions of Americans who, to their credit, know that preparing makes sense. I ask you to encourage your constituents to visit our web site www.Ready.gov or call 1-800-beready as an important first step in ensuring they and their loved ones are prepared for an emergency, whether it's brought on by the forces of evil, or simply the forces of nature.

As of 1 March, we have entered into a number of Memoranda of Understanding that consolidate previously dispersed, national incident support functions into DHS. We have taken responsibility and control of Domestic Emergency Support Team, the Strategic National Stockpile, and America's National Disaster Medical System and Teams. Restructuring these authorities gives the Department the ability to manage major domestic incidents by establishing a single, comprehensive, and coherent national incident management system.

More important than the accomplishments that lie behind us though are the milestones and challenges that still lie ahead.

We are beginning the budgetary cycle for Fiscal Year 2004, another first for our new Department. The President's budget, requesting some \$36.2 billion dollars clearly communicates this administration's commitment to investing in our Homeland Security. It contains a 7.4% increase over the funds our agencies received in FY 03, calls for \$18 billion to secure our borders, \$6 billion dollars for emergencies and first responders, \$829 million for assessing and preventing threats, and \$803 million for science and technology. In order to ensure those, and our current funds, are properly managed we have established policies and procedures for integrating financial management and accounting functions for all our incoming organizational elements.

Also ahead of us are other challenges as well as opportunities to work more efficiently and effectively. We are making good progress on a regional structure that will help to enhance overall accountability and efficiency, but the plan is still under development. When we have a better idea how the regions will be organized we look forward to presenting a final plan to the Congress. And we are working with the Office of Personnel Management to design a personnel management system that will maximize the productivity, morale and efficiency of our most precious resource -our workforce.

We continue to build and refine our partnerships with other Federal Departments, State and Local governments and the private sector. There is no Federal plan that will ensure our Homeland Security, it must be a National plan that involves all Americans. And, it must go beyond even this, working closely with our neighbors and allies overseas, to build an international plan and an international response. We are working to build just such a plan.

While this work goes on we must continue to carefully tend to all the critical missions of the Department of Homeland Security, especially those that are not directly security related. Please be assured that we will continue to provide the level of service we have all come to expect.

We have the support of our partners, like the gentlemen who join me here today, and we have the support of the Congress, which has been critical in bringing us to this point.

The challenges before us are substantial, but we will overcome them because we must. Our American homeland is safer today than it was a year ago, but we live in dangerous times and we cannot count on times to change. That is why the Department of Homeland Security was created, that is why we are moving forward.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to talk about the work we are doing to make America a safer home for us, for our children and for generations to come. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.