



**Remarks as Prepared for Governor Jim Gilmore
Harvard University Kennedy School of Government Forum
“Ready America”
March 31, 2006**

Thank you. I am grateful to everyone for being here and being part of the Kennedy School Conference of the National Council on Readiness and Preparedness. We’ve made a lot of progress on what is the essential challenge facing America today. That, of course, is our nation’s homeland security. I’d also like to thank everyone at the John F. Kennedy School of Government for their hospitality, partnership and I particularly want to thank Former Governor Jim Geringer of Wyoming for his participation and leadership in the conference. I also thank Asst. Secretary J.P. Woodley for coming from Washington, D.C. to join us here in Cambridge. My special thanks go to the sponsors of this conference. NCORP is presently privately funded. I especially wish to thank NCORP’s major donors, including Patricia Cornwell, the best-selling author and my friend, who has made a major contribution to NCORP.

We exist today in a time of great challenge to the security, and even the lives of the American people. We have previously faced, to be sure, threats to our national security. But today we face a new threat by movements that use individuals to potentially infiltrate our communities, to strike at us by stealth attack, using modern weapons and technology to threaten our very homes and families. The purpose of all this is to infect our nation with that most serious threat of all: fear in the minds of Americans: the fear of the unknown, the fear of injury or death, fear for the future.

In the opening session of this conference, Professor Jerry Mechling noted that not a single one of the respected leaders attending this conference rated our readiness and preparedness today as excellent. In fact, a quarter of the attendees rated the state of our readiness as poor, half rated it as fair, and 25% as good....again, not a single respondent chose excellent as the description for where America is today. Excellence is missing. A comprehensive national plan where federal, state and local officials along with the private sector and non-profit community have education, training, communications and resources does not exist today. We all have a role to play and we need a comprehensive plan and strategy that defines those roles so we can learn them and implement them and practice them. That is how we go from where we are today to a nation where our preparedness and readiness can be defined as excellent. That is where America deserves to be and excellence must be our national goal.

The National Council on Readiness and Preparedness was established to address these challenges – and to give a vehicle for Americans again to take charge of their own future.

We're here to develop a national model that can help communities augment and multiply their first response capability by leveraging the resources and assets of the private sector, community organizations and citizens. We are here indeed to begin the work of creating a national community of preparedness. That's a tall order. But it's a critical one that won't get done unless we build it ourselves.

It is vitally important to our country's security that we work together to develop ways that communities can prepare for and respond to attack or crisis during the first 72 hours. So far we have told ourselves that we need only wait, and "they" will come and save us. Whether it's an attack by a terrorist or a natural crisis, communities must know that there is no "they" to look to for help during the first response.

The reality is, in today's world, we are "they" – we are the ones that must prepare and respond to crisis, and in a way that allows our communities to survive until reinforcement can arrive. I call today for a national movement, led and empowered by our first response community, to make ready for any attack or catastrophe that might occur. You've been here two days working very hard to develop a model that can help communities plan for the first 72 hours of crisis. Thankfully you all have the expertise and vision to succeed, and I thank you for your important contribution.

My opportunity to lead in Homeland Security started about 6 years ago, when I was asked to chair the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction. They called it the Gilmore Commission for short, which was ok with me and easier for everyone. But I'd just like to go through how it evolved and the issues we considered.

This commission was formed by Congress in 1999. Now I'd like for you to think about where you were, what you were doing, and what you were thinking about in 1999. I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that whatever it was, it wasn't terrorism. It wasn't homeland security.

But Congress was uneasy. And so was the Clinton Administration. They were concerned that our country wasn't prepared for an attack using weapons of mass destruction. So they created the three-year commission and approached me about being chairman and hired the RAND Corporation to staff the Commission. I felt that this task was a sacred trust, and I was determined to handle it not in a bi-partisan manner, but in a non-partisan manner. No politics. Zero. I'm sure you agree with me that Homeland Security is too important to be subject to partisan politics!

Maybe the best aspect of the commission -- actually the very best -- was its membership. These weren't policy wonks from Washington, D.C. They were police and fire chiefs, emergency response directors, epidemiologists, public health experts, intelligence experts, and retired general officers in the military. These were people in the field; these were the ones who would respond to the 911 call. They weren't concerned with theories; they were concerned with what would work. As we did our work, we never forgot for a moment those first responders who are willing to risk their lives each day for their fellow citizens.

In fact, we are fortunate to have one of the members of the Gilmore Commission with us today, Ellen Embrey, who know is now the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs of the Department of Defense. Ellen, please stand.

And I am very pleased that the vice chairman of the Gilmore Commission, George Foresman, formerly of the Office of Emergency Preparedness for the Commonwealth of Virginia, who has many, many years of field and responder leadership experience, is now the Under Secretary of the Preparedness Directorate of the Department of Homeland Security. This is also a wonderful acknowledgement of the Commission's work. I can assure you we taught George Foresman all he knows!

In our first year, the Commission assessed the risk to the U.S. of a terrorist attack. When it came to a conventional attack, we reported that was highly probable. There had already been the first World Trade Center bombing, the bombing of the Kobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, and the bombing of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. And there was the Oklahoma City bombing too. It was very clear to us that America was in the crosshairs, and that we would likely be attacked on our own soil in the future. We declared that the first step in making ready was to determine up front: "Who is in charge?" We felt strongly that there needed to be a national strategy for dealing with this threat. That was 1999.

In our second year, we reiterated the need for a national strategy. And by a national strategy, we didn't mean a federal strategy. We urged that a national strategy is federal, state, and local. This was a radical approach for a federal commission, and was largely ignored by all authorities, and by the Press who considered Homeland Security far too theoretical, and who turned their attention to more compelling issues, like Monica Lewinsky. Nevertheless, we proposed:

- ✓ The creation of an office in the executive branch to develop and implement a national strategy to combat terrorism; and**
- ✓ Better coordination and information sharing among the federal intelligence agencies.**

In the third year of the commission, the year 2001, we focused on five areas:

- ✓ Empowering state and local governments with the tools to work with the federal government to stop terrorist attacks;**
- ✓ Bolstering the nation's health assets in order to respond to a chemical or biological attack;**
- ✓ Securing our critical infrastructure and protecting our cyber-assets;**
- ✓ Clarifying the appropriate role of the military in homeland security;**
- ✓ Strengthening immigration and border controls to restrict the movements of terrorists crossing our borders and operating within our borders.**

Each year we were required by law to present our report on December 15th. But, in 2001, we finished early and sent it to the printer during the first week of September. One week later, the event occurred that changed our lives and transformed our nation forever.

At the time of the 9/11 attack, I was Governor of Virginia.

That morning, in the Governor's mansion, I watched, and like you, I knew we were under attack.

I took immediate action by picking up the phone and activating Virginia's Emergency Operations Center. I gave orders that any incident of gunfire anywhere in Virginia was to be reported to the operations center. I placed the National Guard on alert. I then went immediately to my office in the Capitol and soon learned that the second state attacked was Virginia. Not a lot of people think of it that way, but the Pentagon is in Virginia. Who responded? Police, fire, rescue, and emergency services from Virginia, and later surrounding states.

Later that morning I received a call from the Commander of the Atlantic fleet, notifying me of ship movements. I held press conferences several times that day, and addressed the people of Virginia that night, to reassure them of what was being done. I visited the Pentagon, and visited those injured in the hospitals of Northern Virginia. Such are the duties of State and local officials who shoulder the responsibility of safety in the communities.

The September 11 attacks led to the extension of the commission for two more years, but we went forward without one of our members. Ray Downey of the New York City Fire Department was killed at the World Trade Center. In the fourth year, we assessed the intelligence community. We recommended the creation of the National Counter Terrorism Center -- a vehicle for the intelligence groups to come together and be in a better position to coordinate and share information. We pointed out that in 2002, there was still no national strategy.

In our fifth and final year, 2003, we expressed concern, serious concern, that the urgency of homeland security was not taking hold. We also began to have a serious concern about the protection of civil liberties in the United States in a time of great fear and anxiety. Frightened people will give up liberty for security. The enemy of liberty is fear. We should never allow the actions of terrorists to cause us to surrender the commitment to liberty that makes us uniquely American.

And perhaps most important, the 5th report outlined how essential the private sector, community organizations and citizens were to preparedness, response and community recovery. We recognized that government was not large enough, nor does it have enough money or employees to effectively prepare and respond to all threats, everywhere and all the time. We are "they."

That was 2003. The focus of the nation on Homeland Security began on September 11, 2001. Now it is 2006. Where are we in the state of our preparations and in our state of mind? Much progress has been made by the faithful Federal Employees, especially of the Department of Homeland Security, who labor to exhaustion to try to make us safer. Much progress has been made in airline and maritime security, although border protection remains ahead, and yet to be done.

We can be proud of the local initiatives in the states and localities, who have exercised initiatives, whether funded by the Federal Government or not. But the fact is that we are

still not prepared, and we know we are not prepared. While there is a National Response Plan, it does not measure up to an operations plan for response. After seven years we still do not know who's in charge, as Katrina so sadly demonstrated.

We have thrown national preparedness into a giant Federal Department, difficult to manage and distracting from the central goal of preparation in every community. Our Health care system has far to go with major surge capacity questions remaining unanswered. Our own Secretary of Health and Human Services recently said about a potential avian flu outbreak: "any community that fails to prepare with the expectation that the federal government will, at the last moment, be able to come to the rescue, will be tragically wrong." How right he is – and how unprepared we are!

In my opinion, the *National Intelligence Strategy* was improperly named. It should have been the *Federal Intelligence Strategy* because in the entire 32 page document, state and local governments are mentioned only once. Recent testimony from the person who now holds the position of National Intelligence Director is encouraging. But, still, there's only one program manager in the federal government assigned to making sure that the federal government is properly sharing intelligence information with local authorities. This country is too big to be protected only by Washington, DC.

Hurricane Katrina demonstrated this clearly. In many ways it was a perfect parallel to a terrorist attack. We knew it was coming, we saw it coming, then it passed, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. But then came the surprise, the attack if you will: the levees broke and flooded the city. We couldn't evacuate the residents. We couldn't ensure security on the streets. We couldn't even get food and water to people in need. Government couldn't perform its most basic responsibility: to ensure the safety and security of the people it serves.

Regardless of whose responsibility it might have been -- federal, state or local -- government alone couldn't handle the job. Who did? Charities like the Salvation Army. Corporations like Wal-Mart and Home Depot. And thousands of individual men and women -- from police officers to ambulance drivers to concerned every day citizens -- who gave back to their community in a time of desperate need. In the hours and days immediately following Katrina, it was the community that responded. It was the community that was there when no one else was. However, if the states and communities are properly organized and incorporated into a comprehensive plan, we can make this country safe again. And we will!

As Governor Geringer said, every citizen is a first responder. At the moment of disaster, catastrophe or terror, we all become first responders. That means we must all think about our roles ahead of time. We must plan, we must prepare, we must know how we are going to communicate and how our leaders will lead. Today, we measure threat levels. Well, the threat is always high. What we should be doing is measuring our preparedness and our readiness levels. That is something I urge each citizen to do starting today. You are first responder. Are you ready? America will not be ready until you can say you have planned, prepared and are ready to take on your role as first responder.

This NCORP conference is only the next step. NCORP is no newcomer to this effort. We may not make the news programs, but we've been around now for over a year. We've visited firehouses in Tennessee and Alabama. We've held an organizing conference in Washington where 700 leaders from the local response community, from 30 states, including 30 mayors, to cry out for their place in this national effort. We've met with the Joint Terrorism Task Force to develop information sharing.

This Ready America initiative, more fully developed by this conference, is the start of such an effort. We recommend policy proposals that communities could begin to adopt tomorrow. We urge the creation of a Responder Corps of trained citizens, prepared to report and assist the first responders in accordance with a plan. We urge the creation of Crisis Response Officers in every business to include the private sector in local response plans. We urge a national communications network to facilitate information as to risk and warning. In fact, we're already working with some localities and regions on pilot programs. Our goal is simple: pull together the right people, from all parts of the community, train them, put the systems in place for them to coordinate, and make sure they have the resources to respond. When we do those things, in every community, America will be ready.

How do we bring America back from the abyss of anxiety into which the terrorists have cast us? I propose that we create a model of response for the first 72 hours. This template must be a blue print of response incorporating into a national network Federal, state, local responders – the private sector and our community leaders. We must get to work, under local leadership, to organize and train and exercise. Then we must communicate all this to the American People – not merely to educate, but to alleviate fear and reassure our citizens that we are as ready as we can be, and to not be afraid. To move on from fear to take on the other work on the agenda of this nation.

So I close by asking a few questions: Who are we as Americans? What is the national character of America? Is it different now than it was before? Lately, I have been doing a lot of reading about the American Revolution. I continue to be absolutely stunned at how, in a short period of time between the French and Indian War and the American Revolution, that we made a determination to do what we did. To throw off the British army in our homeland and to face the danger to create a free nation here in this country.

Think about the Battle of Trenton in which Washington crossed the Delaware to launch a surprise assault on the Hessians. These soldiers marched out of onto that cold, cold ground, some of them without shoes, with very little clothes and got into boats. They went across this river, and ice was so thick that sometimes ice floes would come down and require poles to push the ice off -- all so they could land these threadbare soldiers on the other side.

What was the national character then and what is it now? I will tell you that I believe that the tradition and character of the American people as a free people is still here today. I don't believe we've forgotten the Civil War and what we went through and the punishment of that. I don't think we've forgotten that we opened up the West and the dangers and the risks involved. Can you imagine the danger today, imagine Americans putting everything they had in a wagon cart and taking it across the western plains?

Enduring risk is inherently built into the American character. We are prepared to face risks, I believe, in order to remain free people. But we cannot be changed by fear. We must forge ahead with confidence and take actions that put the destiny of our country in our own hands. In the end, the decision about whether or not the American character will remain will rest with me, and it will rest with you. We can control our destiny. And we will do so while keeping America the beacon of liberty in the world.
