

*Remarks for the
Summit on Domestic Preparedness
November 13, 2001*

Good morning. On September 11, 2001,
just a little more than two months ago, our
world changed.

We became victims of the most horrific
terrorist attack in the history of the world.
In less than an hour, more than 4,000
innocent men, women and children died.

Millions watched around the world as the twin towers were hit, burned and collapsed. In the days after, millions mourned the loss of life and the loss of innocence.

Since September 11, we have faced additional challenges. The threat of anthrax has a nation fearful of opening its mail. White dust or powder found in food or cleaning materials has prompted undue panic.

And our nation's military has taken on the challenge of terrorism, beginning with its efforts in Afghanistan. Deep inside, this is a challenge we know cannot and will not be met quickly. It will take time, and we must be prepared to meet and overcome the challenge.

That's why we're here today. Our best offense against terrorism is a strong defense here at home.

I'm not talking just about a strong military defense; I'm talking about a defense of emergency and law enforcement agencies, a defense of government and courts, and a defense of a people ready for any circumstance.

I'm talking about a defense built on a spirit that has seen this country through some of the bloodiest wars in history.

Yesterday, we honored the veterans who have fought in those wars. I want us to honor them everyday by being ready for anything or anyone who would harm what they fought to protect.

You know, and I know, that Mississippi is ready.

Since the September 11 attacks, we have been taking every precautionary measure to ensure the safety and security of the people of our state.

We have responded to the President's call for increased security support from the National Guard at our airports and, most recently, at the Grand Gulf nuclear facility.

National Guard personnel from around the state are now serving on active duty in support of our military efforts to defeat terrorism.

And here in Mississippi, there is a tremendous sense of cooperation and shared commitment to duty among our public safety and law enforcement agencies.

Last month, in a one-day meeting, representatives from the State Department of Health, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Mississippi Highway Patrol, the FBI and the U.S. Postal Service gathered to assess our situation.

In less than eight hours, they had developed a protocol for law enforcement and emergency agencies to use when handling biological and chemical threats.

An FBI agent at the meeting commented that we were the first state in the nation to accomplish this effort.

At the same time, I issued an executive order establishing a State Incident Management System, based on the National Interagency Incident Management System.

Under this system, all state and local emergency response agencies and personnel will coordinate their work under common terminology, communications and command.

A coordinated and cooperative effort is the best way for us to respond to the needs of the public. And, in situations such as we find ourselves today, we must be pro-active in addressing those needs.

To ensure the best use of our resources of manpower and health care, it is imperative that we educate the public and calm their fears before they reach a panic stage.

Our limits have been tested in recent weeks. We have responded to hundreds of calls statewide about suspicious powders and packages. Tests for anthrax have been run on everything from letters to fig newtons.

Our emergency response efforts have been hindered by threats, hoaxes and unfounded fears. We cannot operate efficiently under these conditions, so again, it is imperative that we educate the public.

Part of this education may come through the development of a comprehensive legislative package to strengthen existing laws regarding biological threats.

I have asked Attorney General Mike Moore to chair a task force to help develop such a package. In talking with law enforcement officers around the state, I am hearing that they would prefer a comprehensive and wide-ranging package as opposed to quick amendments that may not address the larger issue.

However we do it, we will go after those who present threats to the public, real or not. And we will see they receive justice.

Back to the point about educating the public.

The most important thing for them to remember was said in a press conference recently by Dr. Ed Thompson, director of the State Department of Health.

“Unless you hear it from us,” he said, “it’s a rumor.”

And, fortunately, everything so far has been just that. There have been no actual incidents related to the September 11 attacks in Mississippi, and we don’t foresee any.

However, we will stay prepared.

I'm proud of the work that has been done so far by each of you. I am counting on you to keep up this good work, and so are the people of Mississippi.

This summit on domestic preparedness has been met with an overwhelming response. I know it will offer you the skills and information necessary to ensure your communities are prepared.

We're going to win this thing. We're going to win because we're going to be ready, in Mississippi and across the country.

President Bush spoke last week about the spirit of courage and optimism that exists in America. That spirit drives our military, it drives our work here today. That spirit *is* America, and it cannot be defeated.

There's a lot of work ahead of us. The difficult work will take us some time to get done; the impossible work will take us a little longer.

But, we will get it done. That's a promise.

Thank you for your commitment.

God bless you, and God bless America.