

*Remarks for the
Governor's 1st Responders Conference
March 19, 2003*

- Recognize Robert Latham / thank him for
role he's playing as Homeland Security
Director for Mississippi

- Thank attendees for their role on the front
lines of Mississippi's efforts to protect
people and property
 - They are true professionals doing work
we often don't know about
 - Silent efforts to ensure safety of us all

- Since events of 9/11, we've lived on the edge
 - Americans everywhere have walked a delicate line between fear and readiness
 - Confident now that we are ready here in Mississippi

- Monday night President Bush offered ultimatum to Saddam Hussein
 - Get out in 48 hours or war begins
 - Time's almost up

- America's troops, including more than 4,000 of our own Guard and Reserve personnel, are on the front lines
 - Let's keep them in our prayers

- Here at home in Mississippi, you are the ones on the front lines
 - You are well-trained, well-prepared for any scenario
 - Since 9/11, you've done more and learned more than ever before

- Time to put that training to use
 - Signed state of emergency / executive order yesterday
 - Raised threat level to orange (high)

- A couple of weeks ago, we called on President Bush and Secretary Ridge to release federal funds for our emergency responders
 - That was done a few days later / \$7.5 million for Mississippi
 - Funds to support training, equipment, risk and needs assessments

- You must have the tools to do your jobs / protect the people of Mississippi
 - Even if funds not available, we will get the job done
 - There is no other alternative

- We've been preparing for this day since 9/11
 - Summit on Domestic Preparedness
 - Bioterrorism exercises held around the state
 - Incident Command System established to ensure all levels of emergency personnel use common terminology, unified command, integrated communications

- February 5, signed Executive Order 874 establishing State Interoperability Executive Committee
 - Charged with:
 - Coordinating information between state agencies
 - Providing recommendations for immediate and long-term improvement of public safety wireless communications

- Cannot afford to relive problems of 9/11 where fire and police personnel in New York were unable to communicate effectively, with tragic consequences

- This work will be stepped up to ensure we are completely ready

- Want to assure everyone here today that we are going to continue to work together
 - Municipal and county governments will be involved in decision-making and planning
 - Guidelines and support will be available from state agencies

- No emergency responder in Mississippi will be alone in reacting to a situation
 - We are all in this together / that will not change

- Thank you for your courage and
commitment to your jobs and those you
serve
 - This is going to be a difficult time for all
Mississippians
 - I have confidence in your abilities and
skills

- It's also a difficult time for our nation /
world
 - Let's keep each other in our prayers
 - Also pray for President / soldiers /
innocent civilians caught in this struggle
 - Pray for strength and resolve to see this
through to the end

- God bless you / Mississippi / United States