

*Remarks for the  
First Responders Press Conference  
March 3, 2003*

- Recognize Mayor Harvey Johnson, Fire Chief Raymond McNulty, Robert Latham, David Huggins, Charles Chisholm, Dr. Brian Amy

Since the events of September 11, 2001, we have seen a marked change in our handling of emergency situations. We are more prepared than ever before – and with good reason. The threats to our way of life are more evident, more challenging, and more serious.

We have developed new means of responding to those threats. We have strengthened our infrastructure for handling different situations, as well as the spirit of cooperation and partnership between every level of government and our first responders.

In the weeks after 9/11, we brought together representatives from law enforcement, emergency management, and government to develop new means of responding quickly to threats to our citizens.

We held a summit on domestic terrorism to train first responders to the new threats before us. A series of bioterrorism exercises have been held around the state, bringing together local and state officials to learn how to respond to scenarios we pray will never happen.

We developed a website –

[www.homelandsecurity.ms.gov](http://www.homelandsecurity.ms.gov) -- that provides our citizens with quick and accurate information on current threat levels and information on how to prepare for threats.

In recent weeks, the threat level was raised to high – level orange – and first responders around the state and the nation raised their own level of preparation. Last week, the threat level was lowered back to elevated – level yellow.

We are here today to thank our first responders in Mississippi – for their commitment to protecting the public safety and for their dedication to duty. Fire departments, police departments, regional HAZMAT teams, military units and emergency management agencies all went to the next level of preparedness to protect us.

To them, we say thank you – for your silent efforts to ensure our safety and welfare in case of an attack.

I also want to echo the call that has gone out from my fellow governors around the country to Washington, D.C. – a call to release the funding that is so desperately needed to continue to support the efforts of our first responders.

I urge President Bush and Secretary Ridge to release the \$1.2 billion in federal funds for first responders, funds that could include as much as \$3 - 5 million for the State of Mississippi.

No American is free from the threats before our nation – and no American should question the ability of their community to respond to those threats. We cannot support our first responders by ourselves. Support is needed from the federal level, and that support is needed now.

*(turn podium over to Mayor Johnson, then open up for questions)*