

June 4, 2009
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Homeland Security Committee

Madame Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for this privilege to speak with you about the mission and approach of the ReadyCommunities Partnership to increase America's domestic response capabilities in the first 72 hours of a large-scale or national crisis.

My name is George Foresman. I am a former DHS Under Secretary and currently an Advisory Board Co-Chair of the ReadyCommunities Partnership.

The ReadyCommunities Partnership, a project of the Corporate Crisis Response Officers Association, is a response to the recommendation of the Gilmore Commission that a larger role must be developed for the private and community sector in local preparedness and response to crisis.

The Partnership seeks to augment local response capability and reinforce local critical infrastructure by leveraging local assets and best practices through public/private partnerships, recognizing that government doesn't have enough resources to care for all of the people all of the time in all places.

Given the abundance of resources and know-how in the private sector, the Partnership is convinced and believes it is imperative that corporate America be engaged in order for America's communities and businesses to remain resilient in the first 72 hours of a large-scale or national crisis.

Toward that end, the ReadyCommunities Partnership is developing the Prepared Nation Initiative that strongly urges individual Americans and business leaders to take three important steps to improve community resilience:

Step 1: Americans should firstly help themselves by, if you will, putting the "oxygen mask" on themselves first so that they are not a burden to others and can help themselves and their community. This means that each American must take responsibility for choosing and implementing a personal and family preparedness plan such as those developed by Ready.Gov and the American Red Cross.

Step 2: American business must support volunteer responders and critical sector employees by caring for their families especially including the vulnerable and those with special needs in times of crisis in order to augment local response capabilities during the first 72 hours. This act alone can make a substantial difference. At the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Dr. Karen Sexton took responsibility for her employees and patients in an unprecedented fashion during Hurricane Rita to lead the nation's greatest hospital evacuation and return to date in America's history without loss of life.

Step 3: Americans should help their community in that each business should identify a Crisis Response Officer as the liaison between each local facility and emergency response. Known as CROs, they are to be credentialed and plan, train and communicate

with state, local and federal emergency response and the business community prior to crisis through one-on-one meetings and on an as needed basis through law enforcement and other secure portals. For example, Buffalo's Mayor Byron Brown initiated a program to credential critical sector CROs, including critical sector employees and their family members, and has already integrated hundreds of individuals into the Buffalo secure portal. We believe CROs can be a vital addition to local Citizen Corps chapters and can help build a bridge between the public and private/community sector.

In addition to the CRO and the secure portals, the Partnership has identified numerous best practices from the public and private sector which are listed in an open reference tool for Mayors and other community decision makers at www.nationalblueprint.org/.

The Partnership also advocates development of local-based virtual surge depots to catalog and geo-locate local assets for real-time coordination by local and regional community decision makers.

Throughout the year the Partnership works in select communities with stakeholders across all sectors in pilot projects to identify solutions for apparent gaps and shares these lessons learned each December for all stakeholders on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC at the National Congress for Secure Communities.

To date, the Partnership has conducted pilots and/or symposia in the communities of Charleston, South Carolina, Galveston, Texas, Oakland County, Michigan, Eastern Kentucky and Buffalo, New York to identify best practices for preparedness and response.

In 2009 the Partnership seeks to bring stakeholders together from military base and port communities in Charleston, South Carolina and Jacksonville, Florida to model how critical infrastructure and supply chains can be identified and reinforced; and how local critical sector employee family members can be supported during the first 72 hours of crisis such that the base and port communities are more capable of sustained response.

The Partnership is open to all. I serve on the Advisory board alongside Chairman Hon. Asa Hutchinson, former DHS Secretaries Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff, LTG Russel L. Honore', US Army (ret.), General Victor E. Renuart, Jr., USAF, Commander, USNORTHCOM, American Red Cross Chairman Bonnie McElveen-Hunter, Sprint State, Local and Public Safety National Director Mr. Dan Gillison, CMayors Byron Brown and Terry Bellamy and a host of other members from the private, academic and community sectors. You can visit our website and learn more about our Partnership at www.nationalcongress.org.

Thank you for this opportunity to represent the ReadyCommunities Partnership in this discussion today. I invite everyone to participate and would be glad to answer any questions.