



The United States Conference of Mayors

1620 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone (202) 293-7330 • Fax (202) 293-2352
E-mail: info@usmayors.org URL: usmayors.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 24, 2004

Contact: Rhonda Spears
202-861-6766
(rspears@usmayors.org)

Statement of Tom Cochran, Executive Director, The U.S. Conference Of Mayors

Response to press briefing sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) during their Winter Meeting in Washington, D.C. on homeland security. The NGA press briefing was conducted by five state homeland security advisors from Missouri, Georgia, Virginia, Indiana and Washington. No Governors were present at the press briefing.

"The nation's mayors are very encouraged that President George W. Bush came to our Winter Meeting on January 23 and acknowledged that cities are facing challenges regarding homeland security funding. President Bush said, "We will work with the mayors to make sure it [homeland security funding] gets unstuck." The President told the mayors that he understands that the money may be getting stuck at the state level, and that he would be hosting the National Governors Association soon and that this would "provide an opportunity to work this out."

"The nation's mayors left Washington ready, willing and able to work with President Bush on this serious priority. Following the meeting with President Bush, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge contacted U.S. Conference of Mayors President Mayor James Garner of Hempstead to begin the process of working on a solution. At Secretary Ridge's request, I met with the Secretary and his top staff on February 17, the eve of our Winter Leadership Meeting in Key West on February 19-21. Secretary Ridge echoed President Bush's concern and committed to set up a process for elected officials to meet and work towards a balanced solution, and sent top staff to our Leadership Meeting to work on this issue. The mayors left the Leadership Meeting encouraged by the response from Secretary Ridge and his staff.

"We have also been encouraged by our friend and former Boise Mayor Dirk Kempthorne, NGA Chairman, who has stated his desire to work with President Bush, Secretary Ridge and the Conference of Mayors on this issue.

"It is most unfortunate that on February 21, a briefing was sponsored by the National Governors Association during their Winter Meeting at which five non-elected state homeland security advisors failed to recognize what President Bush, Secretary Ridge and the nation's mayors recognize: that serious problems exist in getting the more than \$7 billion in federal first responder assistance down to local fire, police and EMS professionals.

"It is further unfortunate that these state homeland security directors do not understand the urgency of the situation, as has been stated by Secretary Ridge who himself proposed the strict deadlines for getting funding to first responders through the states.

“The NGA statement does not reflect the following: many local officials have not been at the table for the purpose of allocating funding within the states; many local governments are concerned that they are and will be receiving equipment that does not meet their specific first responder needs; and in many cases as a result of old FEMA rescue model, funding is being sent to counties without any mandate to provide the funds to large and small cities. And as reported in our 2nd Homeland Security Monitoring Report, approximately two-thirds of responding cities have still not receiving funding as of January 2004 from the largest federal program which is a block grant to the states.

“And lastly, it is an insult to the nation’s mayors and to the men and women in their police and fire departments for the homeland security director of one state to compare the mayors’ concerns to a “soccer game of 6-year-olds... where everybody wants the ball and is kicking themselves in the shin to get it.”

“From day one, the mayors have advocated a non-partisan and balanced delivery system that would ensure that both local governments and states receive the resources they need in the new domestic war against terrorism.

“As stated before, the nation’s mayors stand today with President Bush and Secretary Ridge to work toward the common goal of ensuring that the more than \$7 billion currently in the field is allocated in a way that guarantees our first responders have the resources they need in the war against terrorism.”

###

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,139 such cities in the country today. Each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. The primary roles of the Conference of Mayors are to promote the development of effective national urban/suburban policy; strengthen federal-city relationships; ensure that federal policy meets urban needs; provide mayors with leadership and management tools; and create a forum in which mayors can share ideas and information. More information about the Conference is available at usmayors.org.