

Testimony of
The Honorable George W. Foresman
Office of the Governor
Commonwealth of Virginia

Before The
Committee on Government Reform
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Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member thank you for the opportunity to testify today to discuss the important issue of preparedness in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Let me begin by acknowledging that the region is better prepared today. I point to the exceptional levels of cooperation among all levels of government during the past thirty days with the dedication of the World War II Memorial and the State Funeral for former President Reagan. In one case we knew the date certain well in advance. In the other it was expected but there was no date certain. In both cases, plans were executed in a manner that allowed activities to proceed safely and as anticipated. The ability for plans to be transformed into successful action is a strong performance measure of whether we are making progress. While the execution was not flawless, it is clear that our collective communication and coordination is stronger and better. It is in that vein of measurable results that I would offer the region is indeed better prepared today.

I should also note that Governor Warner, Governor Erhlich and Mayor Williams are meeting tomorrow in Richmond as part of their regular on-going regional discussions. One of the standing topical areas for these meetings is the status of National Capital Region preparedness initiatives. The fact that this is a regular discussion topic among those three, combined with regular local and Congressional attention, points to the fact that our regional efforts are closely monitored by key leaders. This is good for the NCR.

I also want to personally thank the staff from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) who just recently completed their review of grants management issues in the NCR. They were diligent in their efforts to obtain a level of understanding of funding practices in a region that is very complex, in part, because of the large presence of critical national government functions. Their task was made more challenging by the rapidly evolving nature of homeland security as well as related funding activities. There are those who say that developing our homeland security capabilities locally, at the state level and nationally is like trying to build a plane that is taking off. I expect for the GAO the same is true in terms of their ability to evaluate practices, processes and goals when the one constant is change.

Mr. Chairman I know the Committee is anxious to discuss the NCR. But it is also important that I provide some perspective about the entire Commonwealth because our activities mirror the focus in the NCR. Since the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, the Commonwealth has been allocated more than 300 million dollars in federal funding. The funding has come in a variety of ways, direct earmarks, through federal grant programs and collaterally where we were the direct beneficiaries of federal agency preparedness initiatives. Every city and county in the Commonwealth has benefited. State government and the private sector have benefited. Every Virginia citizen and those who visited the Commonwealth have benefited. The benefit has come in the context of the whole. The sum capabilities of local, state and private sector readiness has improved. Mr. Chairman, without objection I would like to offer our latest spreadsheet of some of the major federal prevention and preparedness local funding allocations for Virginia for the record.

Having talked about benefits it does not imply that every fire, law enforcement, emergency management, public health or the host of other local, state and private sector activities with critical responsibilities has been a direct beneficiary. The simple fact is that there will likely never be sufficient financial resources – federal, state, local or private – to address the full range of potential needs of each community, discipline or organization. Consequently, much of our effort during the past 2 ½ years has been dedicated to addressing the higher priority needs and establishing a preparedness focus that is “right sized” against the full range of other legitimate competing priorities ranging from gang violence, to health care to transportation. All that needs to be done cannot be accomplished overnight. We are focused on pro-actively managing the homeland security effort rather than reacting to it.

This is important. It mirrors the approach in Maryland and the District of Columbia and in other states and communities across America as well as our federal government. It represents a disciplined approach. This focus has required that we collectively undertake three key activities.

First we have spent a great deal of time simply “getting a handle” on the wide range of on-going prevention and preparedness initiatives and efforts, many that pre-dated 9/11, with the goal of leveraging, wherever possible, on-going or completed work. This ranges from DoD sponsored assessments of critical infrastructure in Tidewater and Northern Virginia begun prior to 2001 to assessing advancements in our Northern Virginia communities provided through federal funding following the September 11th attacks. It also includes the wide-ranging effort being placed on strengthening public health, hospital and private health care capabilities. Simply put it would be unwise to use limited financial resources to undertake efforts that may have already been completed or to duplicate other on-going activities. Also, it was and is critically important that we synchronize all efforts towards common goal.

Secondly we continue to focus on identifying the wide range of needs. Let me be clear, needs differ from wants. The understanding of the terrorism threat continues to evolve. Through education the ability of local and state officials and our private sector

partners to manage risk has dramatically improved. Homeland Security is not simply about terrorism. It represents our ability to prevent, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters, including terrorism. Consequently as we manage the full range of risks facing Virginia we do so focused on identifying the level of risk we must reasonably accept. This management process allows us to prioritize those processes, systems and capabilities – human and equipment – that are needed to mitigate that risk we cannot accept. This drives us to identifying our needs.

Finally we are placing a premium on creating a sustainable approach to governance that is adaptable to future changes in risk and reinforces proven existing structures. Governor Warner said it very simply. Don't create a new bureaucracy. We work with and through others – existing structures and processes – to create and enterprise approach to prevention and preparedness. It requires us to reduce stovepipes and turf with the goal of creating an enterprise wide approach – vertically between the three levels of government and horizontally among all agencies of government and with the private sector and citizens. This is a culture change process and its success is dependent on how we “govern” this change.

As noted efforts in Virginia reflect the approach for governance across the NCR. The approach is to work with and through others. The most valuable lesson learned after 9/11 was in identifying where ultimate coordination needed to occur to achieve unity of effort. In the case of Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia the two Governor's and Mayor indicated it would be the Senior Policy Group. At the local level it became the appropriate role of the Chief Administrative Officials (CAO's). The creation of the Office of National Capital Region Coordination addressed the federal executive branch coordination needs with state and local efforts. Organizations including the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments, the National Capital Region Emergency Preparedness Council, the Washington Board of Trade, WMATA, Northern Virginia Regional Commission and a host of others have “rounded out” the stakeholders needed to turn concepts into completions.

The forerunner of the NCR Senior Policy Group was created in the spring of 2002, in advance of Administration or Congressional action to create the Department of Homeland Security/ONCRC. The two Governors and Mayor recognized the coordination challenge and the critical roles of the two states and the District towards enhancing cooperation and coordination. Encouraged by both expanding White House commitment to address federal executive branch coordination issues and concurrent NCR Congressional delegation efforts to bring a more orderly approach to the plethora of federal funding requests across the region, the Governors and Mayor initiated the executive level coordination group. This group later became known as the Senior Policy Group.

The goal from the beginning has been to better coordinate and facilitate the integration of effort and not to create duplicative and competing organizational structures. During the past 2 ½ years we have been working across the stakeholder groups in the NCR to gain a better understanding of efforts already underway, identifying needs to

manage risk and crafting a solid approach that improves our ability to manage the effort over the longer term. I will be the first to admit we have not been error free along the way. Because the true regional approach in the context of preparedness represents a departure from the norm we had to create new structures for governance in the context of making as well as executing spending and program decisions. I would offer that much credit goes to our local partners who have invested time and energy to “walking the walk” in terms of regional cooperation. Along the way we have all adjusted our approaches to solve problems.

We remain steadfast in the commitment to find the right balance between speed and diligence. The foundation we are putting in-place to synchronize efforts must survive beyond short-term accomplishments. We are in various stages of addressing many of the readily identifiable issues. Improved preparedness across the entire NCR – public and private sector -- will require more than addressing these readily identifiable issues. It is a longer-term effort. As the national approach to homeland security matures so will the NCR’s. Consequently, the combination of this maturity process and the increasing complexity of issues yet to be addressed requires that our structures to prioritize, manage and synchronize efforts are well developed.

This is not bureaucracy. It is simply good management. Leaders and citizens expect and deserve evidence that we are applying limited resources in a manner that does the most good. No doubt at some point in the not to distant future GAO, Congress or the media will be asking for the qualitative measures of progress. The governance structure is designed to make this happen.

You have asked what are the challenges. There are many but I would respectfully call the Committee’s attention to the recent report of the Homeland Security Funding Task Force established by Secretary Ridge to look at systemic issues associated with the funding processes. Governor Warner worked with other state as well as local elected officials on the Task Force in a bi-partisan effort to assess concerns about whether funding was reaching intended recipients effectively. Mr. Chairman, without objection I would like to offer that recently released report for the record.

Simply put the real and perceived concerns expressed by many during the past year and reflected in the Task Force report replicate the governance challenges that we continue to face in the NCR. These include; 1) the necessity for forward thinking planning about future efforts concurrent with immediately addressing the higher priority prevention and preparedness issues with current grant awards, 2) using grants management cash management guidelines designed for ordinary program delivery to address needs during what is arguably a current and high threat environment 3) a clear need for better management of expectations across the full spectrum – local, state, federal and private sector officials as well as our citizens and 4) processes for measuring performance that is not simply based on the speed of moving funding.

Underscoring the findings were two major attributes that guided the work of the task force. First the goal was not to assign blame because frankly these were “enterprise

wide problems that demanded an enterprise wise set of solutions”. Secondly, that major adjustments in the funding processes at the time they were beginning to mature and when local, state and tribal officials were gaining expertise in their administration would be counter-productive. I would call your attention to the primary recommendation that Congress consider suspension of application of the Cash Management Act for FY 2005 for certain grant programs in an effort to further infuse energy into local, state and prevention and preparedness initiatives. This will help all of us, including the NCR.

As I noted earlier these and the other activities that are being discussed today are being done concurrent with initiation of work on the more readily identifiable and higher priority readiness activities. Much progress has been made. While I appreciate the work of the GAO in evaluating these efforts I believe their focus, and appropriately so, was limited to a small part of the grant process. It did not look at the broader operational, program and policy coordination issues that have permeated across the entire region. For instance, in preparing for today’s testimony the SPG consulted so that we provided the Committee the broadest possible overview of initiatives without too much duplication or repetition.

Let me briefly comment about the Office of National Capital Region Coordination (ONCRC). I personally was not in favor of the office when initially proposed. That was a mistake on my part and I was wrong. Mr. Lockwood and his predecessor Mr. Byrne along with Mr. Wall who was the Acting Director have made phenomenal contributions to the NCR. While we continue to work with our local, District, Maryland and private sector partners to synchronize our efforts, the ONCRC has been effective at serving a similar critically needed coordination function within DHS and across the federal government. There is real synergy between everyone and the ONCRC continues to be a very effective partner in the overall efforts. This is truly a group effort.

The ONCRC, Senior Policy Group and the local Chief Administrative Officials have worked to maintain organizational discipline – building on proven relationships between levels and agencies of government and the private sector as well as successful processes for grant management and performance measurement. It has not been easy or error free. Creating a regional process in an environment where stakeholders typically measure performance by accomplishments of individual communities has required adjustments. This includes getting beyond the idea of measuring an individual jurisdictions success by how many dollars it has received. I think many of the challenges we continue to overcome reflect the fact that we are exploring new ground individually as a region and collectively as a nation.

Finally, the GAO report does not provide the full picture of the challenge – the critical importance of integrating private sector initiatives as part of the larger effort. There are significant policy issues that are being considered within the context of the private sector’s role within the NCR. There are a number of issues to be resolved about the commitment of public funds to address priority needs in the private sector. I am comfortable noting that much progress has been made on all fronts since 9/11. While

much attention has been focused on public sector activities it has not been to the total exclusion of our private sector partners. Clearly it has not been at a level that all of us would have liked. Reality dictated that we prioritize and focus efforts. We have, however, reached a point in the maturity of our governance and program processes that we can place additional emphasis on better integration of private sector prevention and preparedness efforts during the coming year.

The acknowledgement by GAO of progress made thus far in increasing the preparedness of the National Capital Region is appreciated and we agree that we must continue to work towards improved prevention and preparedness through the development of standards, clear performance goals and the establishment of an improved method for tracking regional initiatives. Work must be done to ensure that the efforts of the ONCRC, SPG and the localities, which have given us a solid framework, are not lost in a mix of misunderstandings. We are looking forward working together to move forward and build upon our improved prevention preparedness efforts in the NCR. We appreciate the Committee on Government Reform and the GAO's continuing commitment to helping us improve the collective readiness of Virginia and the NCR.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.