



1-1-2004

Panel Three: Homeland Defense -- Controlling the Border of Terror Revisited

Jerry Bussell

Homeland Security Advisor to the State of Nevada

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Recommended Citation

Jerry Bussell, *Panel Three: Homeland Defense -- Controlling the Border of Terror Revisited*, 17 *TRANSNAT'L LAW* 137 (2004).

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/globe/vol17/iss1/15>

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Commentary by Colonel Jerry Bussell (Retired)*

Around the turn of the century, there was a fellow called Edgar Watson Howe and if you have heard of him, I would be surprised. He was a homespun newspaper editor in Atchison, Kansas, quite a character but a real friend of the common folk. He said, "A government is mainly an expensive organization organized to regulate evil-doers and tax the rest of us. A government has little to do for responsible people except to annoy them." I am not sure he would have understood my responsibilities to the State of Nevada and the Governor. I am not sure I understand them, and I hope that will come out either in my talk with you this afternoon or in the questions and answers.

December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked our military installations at Pearl Harbor. That attack suddenly and unexpectedly thrust America into World War II. Americans responded overnight. Men and women by the millions joined the Armed Forces. And here on the home front, almost every citizen got into the fight. Both citizens and soldiers alike protected this country, and their deeds are truly legendary. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Admiral Yamamoto uttered the often quoted "I fear that we have wakened the sleeping giant and filled him with resolve."

Let's fast forward to September 11, 2001, the day the world changed, or as Dr. Malloy said, "No, that's the day we changed." America was suddenly and again unexpectedly thrust into a war, but this time it was a different war. It was different because the attack was not by a sovereign foreign government on a military installation. The attack was directed at innocent civilians. Different as it was, America responded in much the same way as it did in World War II. Thousands of men and women went to recruiting stations, citizens reached into their pockets and gave millions to charities and to the families of those who were affected. American flags flew everywhere, and patriotism rose to that WWII level. Once again there is a front. We are standing quite possibly on the banks of the Rubicon. Iraq may very well be attacked. The drums are in fact beating. But, there is a home front also, and each one of us in this room are soldiers in that home front, whether we like it or not.

From adversity comes opportunity. Out of the ashes of the World Trade Center and the smoke of the Pentagon, emerged that terrible resolve that Admiral Yamamoto was talking about. It is alive and it is well today. I heard yesterday that we may not be any better prepared then we were on 9/11. I take exception to that position; and I hope I can defend it in questions and answers.

On September 20, 2001, President Bush, in his address to Congress and the Nation announced the creation of the Office of Homeland Security. He appointed then Governor, Tom Ridge, as the head of that office.

* Homeland Security Advisor to the State of Nevada. Colonel Bussell received his Bachelor of Science Degree and Regular Army Commission on 1967 from the University of Tennessee at Martin, where he distinguished himself as Chief Justice of the Student Body, Commander of Cadets, ROTC, Distinguished Military Student and Distinguished Military Graduate.

At the time the Office of Homeland Security became a reality, many in Congress said this was not enough. They claimed that we did not need Homeland Security Office. They supported their assertions by saying that the government was dysfunctional, especially in the intelligence-gathering arena: They claimed that one agency does not coordinate with one another; they accused the agencies of not communicating. In essence, they said that the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing; that there is no common purpose, direction, or understanding. That is how these critics characterized our government. So what happened? At first, nothing happened. The White House thought Governor Ridge with his clout could carry the day.

But, a good friend of mine, a representative from Nevada, Jim Gibbons, pushed for change. Jim started what would soon be the Department of Homeland Security. On the floor of the House of Representatives he said: "The White House of ours has been historically toothless, unable to control the activities of Cabinet bureaucracies. For a Homeland Security Czar to be effective, Governor Ridge will need the ability to influence budgets." Jim then introduced and co-sponsored the House of Representative Bill 3026. The bill was the start of what later became the Department of Homeland Security.

It is the most significant change to our government since the National Security Act of 1947. It consists of twenty-two separate agencies, and one hundred seventy different people. It is one department with one purpose, to protect America from terrorism.

I am not going to sit up here today and read you my definition of terrorism with Dr. Malloy sitting in the audience. I am not about to define terrorism, other than to say in my interpretation terrorism is fear. It is intended to produce fear in someone other than the victim. The attack on the World Trade Center was not conducted to attack those particular victims. It was an attack against us, you and me. Terrorists know what they are doing. Their selection of a target is planned, and it is rational. They are conscious and determined in the effects they seek. Their violence is neither spontaneous, nor is it random. Terrorists do not recognize innocent people, they target them. A terrorist's primary objective is publicity; if no one knows about the attack, they cannot instill widespread fear. The requirement for publicity almost always drives target selection. The greater the symbolic value of the target, the more publicity the target will bring, and thus, the more fear it generates.

Given these considerations, we must be duly vigilant. We must be prepared.

Most importantly, if you're not in imminent danger, go on with your life. If you were to get up that morning and go to work, get up and go to work. If you were going to go play golf, play golf. If you were going to take your family on a picnic, go on a picnic. Remember the single purpose of terrorism is to instill fear in you. The terrorist cannot take away our freedom. The only way we can lose our freedom is to give it away. Hopefully in my role, I can help ensure Americans can continue with their normal lives, despite the existence of terrorism and terror threats.

So what is my role in all of this? I was appointed by Governor Kenny Guinn in November 2001. I am his advisor. Though I would have done it free I am paid from two grants, one from the Center of Disease Control, which is a strange way to pay a Homeland Security Advisor, but when you think about the threats out there, whether it be the plague, smallpox, or other chemical or biological threats, maybe it makes sense. The Justice Department pays the other side of my salary. I have been funded for one year. I have no budget, I have no employees, I have no formal authority. Does this sound like Governor Ridge? I aim to advise the Governor on homeland security the best I can on areas affecting the state and on how to coordinate closely all the agencies within this state. We are trying to set up a Homeland Security Committee to help accomplish these goals. Essentially, the job description is not yet concrete; it is still evolving. I work as a liaison with federal agencies, state agencies, and with local and private agencies. I am to oversee a number of the different departments. It just goes on, and there is quite a laundry list including attendance at national meetings and working with the public. That is why I am here today learning. These tasks and goals are what I think I should do and how I think the job description should read. In addition, during the next several years, significant Homeland Security federal dollars may be available to Nevada. As the Homeland Security Advisor, I will serve as the single point of focus for these federal funds. With the approval of the Governor and the legislature, I will oversee the process of obtaining these funds, coordinating the investment decisions with all agencies, in order to avoid conflicts, redundancies, and misallocation of those resources. In the event of an incident, I will serve as the Governor's advisor and keep contact for operational decisions.

As I see it, I face some challenges. The number one challenge is the federal funding formula. In many cases, I found that it is like a cookie cutter, you have the 2000 population or our census, and you have a pot of money. They literally just cut it up based on population. Now, for you in California, that's a pretty great idea because you have a large population, but for us in Nevada, that may not be such a good idea.

Let me tell you why we are unique. Within three miles, on the Las Vegas Strip, exist eleven of the largest hotels in this country. All those people amount to as many people as the population of Salt Lake City. Every one of these men, women and children live in Nevada during their stay at these hotels. Think about that when you fund Nevada based on a population census for residents of Nevada. That amounts to a very unique situation. Regardless, what am I going to do about it? I am not sure, but I do know I am going to ensure that the Badge Guy, the Suit Guy, and the Gun Guy can talk to each other. I will assure you that the city of Las Vegas and the city of Reno can talk to each other, including all of the firemen, the policemen, and the emergency respondents. In fact that communication issue is solved, all these people and entities can and do communicate with one another. However, at this time, we do not have this same communication success in regard to talking to our neighboring states. But, that is our next initiative, and I am working

very hard with the entities within our state to accomplish that goal. That is a priority for me in my responsibilities.

Another issue currently under review is Nevada's open meeting law. Nevada probably has one of the widest, if not the widest, open meeting law that I have been able to find. Are there things that we should be able to do and discuss behind closed doors in light of threats and vulnerabilities? Should some of our capabilities and resources be spoken about privately? Currently, we are reviewing these issues. I do not know how they will turn out.

Quarantine is another issue being dealt with. Nevada cannot quarantine collectively. What do I mean by that? I mean that each person has to be quarantined. That can create a problem because in response to terrorist situations we might have to quarantine a whole street or a whole block. To do so legally, I would have to go to that street and ask every person their name so I could then quarantine them. That might create a little bit of a problem.

As for the smallpox issue, we are in the process of putting the procedures into place to meet the federal request to start smallpox inoculations. Let me assure you that, this problem is neither easy, nor is it going to be solved quickly. I am not going to sit in front of you and say that the federal government should have thought this through a little bit before they put out rules because there is a danger. However, I do not believe there is an imminent danger. But we are working on this issue, and I can tell you it is a deep dark hole.

In closing, if I am able through observation, sound judgment, and good analysis to provide timely advice to my Governor, I will serve him, I will serve my State, and I will serve my country. Thank you.