

Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis
Committee on Government Reform
“Target Washington: Coordinating Federal Homeland Security Efforts With Local
Jurisdictions in the National Capital Region”
June 24, 2004

Good morning. A quorum being present, the Committee on Government Reform will come to order. I would like to welcome everyone to today’s hearing entitled, “Target Washington: Coordinating Federal Homeland Security Efforts With Local Jurisdictions in the National Capital Region.”

This hearing is the Committee’s third in our series on emergency preparedness in the NCR. Following last year’s hearings, the Committee asked the General Accounting Office (GAO) to examine the budget and spending plans for the NCR in hopes that it would help Congress identify whether this region is sufficiently funded and whether the funds are being used effectively and efficiently. We are here today to examine their findings and to bring the key components of our regional homeland security efforts together to identify what has been done to date and what work remains.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, unfortunately confirmed the recognition of the NCR as a top terrorist target. The primary obligation of any government is the safety and security of its citizens, and we have been acting on many fronts to fulfill this obligation. The Federal government and local Washington area jurisdictions have taken a number of actions to strengthen our ability to prevent and respond to emergencies, and in the NCR, this requires the highest level of coordination. The National Capital Region has to be the most prepared in the nation. It is home to 12 local jurisdictions, two states, the District of Columbia, and the Federal government, including the White House, the Congress, and the Supreme Court. This is not an easy task for a region that has multiple police forces and emergency plans.

Recognizing the unique nature of the region and the need for a high level of coordination, Congress created the Office for National Capital Region Coordination (ONCRC) within the Department of Homeland Security. This office was created to coordinate activities between the various entities in the region, to ensure that preparedness programs and activities are developed and evaluated under appropriate standards, and to ensure that resources are allocated so as to improve and sustain regional preparedness. The ONCRC has an important role in setting goals and priorities and assisting states and local jurisdictions to think, plan and prepare regionally.

In Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003, the federal government appropriated approximately \$340 million for homeland security efforts in the NCR. It is our understanding that all of the Fiscal Year 2004 Urban Area funding, totaling \$23.9 million, as well as portions of prior year funding have yet to be obligated. The time has come to ask difficult questions so that we can determine the road ahead. Congress has dramatically increased funding for these efforts over the last few years, but have we increased capabilities and preparedness as a region? What have we done with the federal funding to date? How were funding decisions for the region made? How did we enhance preparedness? What is the remaining gap and how do we intend to close it?

Some members of Congress, as well as some state and local officials, have contended that funds provided for first responders have been insufficient. This has been an incomplete discussion, however, because in order to determine the funding needs, we must have a full and accurate assessment of where we are and where we need to be. It is readily apparent that we need to move away from generalities when speaking of emergency preparedness and coordination and talk specifics. General strategies are a beginning, but they must transfer into specific roadmaps for local, state, Federal and private sector actions.

Yesterday, the infamous “Tractor Man,” who effectively held the region hostage for two days in March 2003, was sentenced to six years in prison. Justice was served. But we’re here again today asking if we’re better prepared for “prime time.” We’re here today wondering whether and how preparedness has improved in the past 14 months.

It is my hope that this hearing will further this discussion, and in doing so help Congress, DHS, and the localities within the NCR to set a mutually-agreed upon baseline capability, identify the gaps, set priorities and measure progress. The bottom line is that the funding needs of the region and the nation are nearly infinite, and therefore it is of the utmost importance to structure the manner in which we go about filling these needs.

In its testimony today, the General Accounting Office lays out the challenges the NCR is facing in coordinating and managing emergency preparedness in our region. GAO’s conclusions are troubling, but not terribly surprising given the complexity of the task at hand.

An earlier draft of the GAO report noted the vacancy at the top of the Office of National Capital Region Coordination as a contributing factor to the challenges we’re facing. I’m glad to see that the position has now been filled, and that Mr. Lockwood is here today to share his vision for improving planning and coordination.

We have two impressive panels of witnesses before us to help us understand the issues surrounding this important issue. I would like to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before the Committee, and I look forward to their testimony. I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Waxman, for his opening statement.