

Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for Tom Ridge as Director of the Office of Homeland Security
October 8, 2001

Please be seated. Thank you all. Welcome to the White House.

Today I signed an Executive order creating a new Homeland Security Office, charged with strengthening America's protections against terrorism. And I've picked a really good man to lead that office. In case you hadn't figured it out, it's Tom Ridge. *[Laughter]*

Together, we will confront the threat of terrorism. We will take strong precautions aimed at preventing terrorist attacks and prepare to respond effectively if they might come again. We will defend our country, and while we do so, we will not sacrifice the freedoms that make our land unique.

The best defense against terror is a global offensive against terror, wherever it might be found. Yesterday we opened another front on the war on terrorism as we began conventional military operations designed to destroy terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban Government.

Secretary Don Rumsfeld, who is leading a really fine team, will brief the country this afternoon. But he informed me this morning that the military mission of yesterday was executed as planned, and at the same time, that our good Nation dropped over 37,000 kits of food and medicine. This is an important part of a war already underway that is being conducted on many fronts.

The first shot of the war was fired several weeks ago, as we began freezing bank accounts and cutting off funding of known terrorist organizations and front groups that support them. And I appreciate so very much the Secretary of Treasury's work, Paul O'Neill.

We've worked aggressively on the diplomatic front, developing a broad and strong coalition of countries who are united with

us and involved in our campaign. And Mr. Secretary Powell and his team have done a remarkable job of rallying the lovers of freedom to our side. Mr. Secretary, thank you.

Our intelligence and law enforcement agencies are working around the clock and around the world. Attorney General Ashcroft and George Tenet and Bob Mueller are all doing a fantastic job of making sure we've got the best intelligence and the best information, not only to protect ourselves but to bring the evildoers to justice.

On all efforts and all fronts, we're going to be ongoing and relentless as we tighten the net of justice. This will be a long war. It requires understanding and patience from the American people. Members of my Cabinet understand that, and I appreciate them all being here. These are fine Americans who understand the nature of the conflict and are prepared to join me in doing whatever it takes to win the war, not only for our country today but for generations to come tomorrow.

It's an honor for me to welcome the Ridge family here to the White House: the former first lady of Pennsylvania, Michele Ridge, and of course, Lesley and Tommy, thank you all for being here, and thank you for your sacrifice.

I want to thank all of Tom's friends for coming up from Pennsylvania. It looks like he's got a few who don't live in Pennsylvania, as well. Thank you all for being here. I'm so appreciative that Clarence Thomas is here to swear in Tom. I appreciate the Mayor of Washington, DC, being here. Mr. Mayor, thank you for your cooperation. It's just the beginning of what we need to do together to make sure our Nation's Capital is safe and secure.

As we've learned, we face new threats, and therefore we need new defenses for our country. And I've found the right man to coordinate that effort. Tom Ridge has been a chief executive. He is a leader who has shown he can draw the best out of people and out of organizations. He's a decorated combat veteran of the Vietnam war. He's a patriot who has heard the sound of battle. He's seen the reach of terror in a field in his own State. He's a man of compassion who has seen what evil can do.

I've given Tom and the Office of Homeland Security a mission: to design a comprehensive, coordinated national strategy to fight terror here at home. We face a united, determined enemy. We must have a united and determined response.

The Homeland Security Office has a series of specific goals and will have my authority to meet them: One, take the strongest possible precautions against terrorism by bringing together the best information and intelligence—in the war on terror, knowledge is power; strengthen and help protect our transportation systems, our food and water systems, and our critical infrastructure by making them less vulnerable to attack; respond effectively to terrorist actions if they come. The Office will coordinate Federal assistance with State and local efforts. America is going to be prepared.

The Office will work in conjunction with the new Homeland Security Council, chaired by me and made up of my Cabinet and other senior officials. The Office mission will have the full attention and complete support of the very highest levels of our Government.

I know that many Americans at this time have fears. We've learned that America is not immune from attack. We've seen that evil is real. It's hard for us to comprehend the mentality of people that will destroy innocent folks the way they have. Yet, America is equal to this challenge, make no mistake about it. They've roused a mighty giant. A compassionate land will rise united to not only protect ourselves, not only make our homeland as secure as possible but to bring the evildoers to justice so that our children might live in freedom.

It's now my honor to call Clarence Thomas up here to swear in Tom Ridge.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:53 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Director Ridge. The Executive order is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks on Signing the Columbus Day Proclamation *October 8, 2001*

Thank you very much. I'm glad I invited you. [*Laughter*] Thank you all for coming. Laura and I are delighted to have you here to celebrate Columbus Day. Since 1934, when Franklin Roosevelt first proclaimed the national holiday, our entire Nation has observed Columbus Day to mark that moment when the Old World met the New. We honor the man from Genoa and the

vision that carried him throughout his 10-week voyage. And we recognize—as well, we recognize the unique contributions that people of Italian descent have made here in our country for more than five centuries.

Italian Americans were among the many public servants last month who gave extraordinary service in an hour of dire emergency. Some are with us today. The fire