

# Mayors, Counties Demand Local Health And Infrastructure Buildup

by Carl Osgood

Two recent meetings in Washington, D.C.—an emergency summit of the U.S. Conference of Mayors on Oct. 24-25, and a meeting of the National Association of Counties' Task Force on Homeland Security on Oct. 26—highlighted the role that municipal and county police, fire, emergency, and public health services play in responding to any incident of terrorism on U.S. soil. Local police, fire, and emergency services respond first to any incident, and local jurisdictions expect and want to be in charge no matter the type or magnitude of the incident. This was the case at the Pentagon on Sept. 11, where the Arlington County, Virginia Fire Department remained in overall command of the fire fighting, and rescue and recovery efforts, for 11 days, even though it was a Federal building owned by the Defense Department, and assistance came from state and Federal agencies, and all of the surrounding jurisdictions.

Both meetings had the purpose of bringing to the attention of Federal officials, the difficulties cities and counties are facing in dealing with the increased threats to public health and safety since the attacks of Sept. 11 and the anthrax spread that has developed since then. Carefully planned city and county budgets, already under strain because of economic conditions, have been made irrelevant by increasing costs for security and public health.

The mayors and the counties presented lists of demands for help to the Federal officials, including to Homeland Security Chief Tom Ridge, who spoke to them. Underlying their concerns is the economic collapse, which has only accelerated since Sept. 11. The common areas of concern of the mayors' and counties' organizations include physical security of infrastructure, Federal-local law enforcement cooperation, and public health. In addition, the mayors meeting demanded a real economic stimulus program for recovery from the worsening fiscal, unemployment, and infrastructure situation of the cities.

## Law Enforcement Secrecy Ranks

One important issue for local officials is intelligence-sharing with the Federal government. The mayors' action plan calls for a "new protocol governing the coordination of Federal and local law enforcement," which would establish a new system of communication among all Federal public safety and local law enforcement agencies, "with much more

detailed intelligence being provided to local law enforcement."

The mayors' task force that developed the recommendations relating to law enforcement issues, was co-chaired by Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley. During Oct. 5 testimony to the House, O'Malley blasted the FBI for its failure to cooperate with local police. "The disconnect in criminal intelligence is the biggest threat right now and the most dangerous one," he said. Baltimore Police Commissioner Edward Norris added, "We have to know what the FBI knows about threats, tips, and even rumors." Norris explained that his department has hundreds of informants and is therefore much closer to the ground than is the FBI; the police have access to much more information about what is going on in the streets and in the neighborhoods, but the FBI does not provide them sufficient information to make use of their informants. After the Sept. 11 attacks, all the FBI gave his department was a "watch list" with hundreds of names, without even photographs or aliases to aid local police.

FBI Director Robert Mueller addressed the mayors' meeting, and promised to improve intelligence-sharing between the FBI and local law enforcement. Mueller noted that one of the most persistent complaints he'd been hearing since taking office on Sept. 4 is that, while the FBI is always calling on local police to track down information for the Bureau, it often withholds information from those same police agencies. He told the mayors that the watch list has been added to the National Crime Information Center list, but "we often do not have much more than names or aliases." He promised that photos and other information will be included as it becomes available.

Deputy Attorney General Larry D. Thompson addressed the counties meeting. He made the same vague promises as Mueller had to the mayors. He also made the same excuses about the lack of specificity of the information in the Department of Justice's possession. That didn't stop the counties from calling on the Department of Justice to grant access to *classified information* to at least two people in every county police department.

## Strengthen Public Health

The first line of defense against a biological weapons attack will be the public health system. This goes far beyond



*The National Conference of Mayors demanded a buildup of local public health capabilities, and real economic recovery. Conference president Marc Morial of New Orleans asked Congress for “a comprehensive plan that includes tax relief, benefits for the unemployed, and strategic infrastructure investment to create jobs.”*

simply hospitals and hospital beds, to include infectious disease surveillance and control, and safety and security of public water supplies. Both meetings focussed on the topic of biological terrorism, and the role of public health infrastructure to respond to it.

The mayors’ meeting included a panel on biological terrorism, moderated by Boston Mayor Tom Menino, which heard from Dr. Tara O’Toole, of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Biodefense Studies. The mayors also heard from Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson, who described the emergency response capabilities in his department, including the 50-ton stockpiles of medical supplies, known as PUSH packages, that are deployable within hours to any point in the United States.

The mayors’ action plan calls, first and foremost, for resources to strengthen local public health infrastructure. It also asks that HHS coordinate training efforts for public and private sector health care personnel and develop for adequate and secure communication and data analysis systems, to ensure coordinated implementation of public health disaster preparedness plans. The plan also calls for adequate stockpiles of vaccines and drugs, and a testing system that allows for rapid identification of biological agents.

The counties were more explicit in calling for the rebuilding of local public health systems. Patrick Libbey, the director of public health for Thurston County, Washington, and also president of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), highlighted the fact that most public health departments have a very small resource base on which to operate. He noted that the key role of the public health system is the “timely detection and investigation of unusual clusters of illnesses consistent with a biological weapons attack,” and “rapid investigation once an outbreak

is detected.” Key to any such investigation is “rapid access to laboratory services.”

He warned that because of the incubation period of many of the pathogens expected to be used as weapons, the time factor is critical to containing an outbreak. “We cannot wait,” he said, “to import a Federal team to do that initial work.” He called for a “much more robust surveillance and epidemiological capacity than what we have in place currently.”

While the mayors approved of Thompson’s plan to increase the number of PUSH packages, the counties clearly did not. Libbey said that one of NACCHO’s concerns about the Bush Administration’s proposals is that “they tend to emphasize bringing in Federal resources and tend not to emphasize the development of the local capacity.” He said that what the Federal government is proposing is needed, but by itself, “it will not help us to move quickly to detect and contain” an outbreak.” He concluded, “If we correctly build our capacity to deal with bioterrorism, it will actually go way beyond dealing with a terrorist issue. It will re-enable the public health system in this country to much more effectively deal with those kinds of threats to our health on an ongoing basis,” such as *E. coli*, food-borne illness, or safe drinking water.

Lyndon LaRouche’s call for “national defense against germ warfare” (see lead article this section) emphasizes the same fundamental relation between a “wartime” mobilization of public health functions, and protection of citizens’ general welfare.

### **Mayors Back Reid’s Infrastructure Plan**

The mayors’ meeting also called for infrastructure investment as a way of stimulating the economy. New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial, the president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, urged that Congress should put together “a compre-

hensive plan that includes tax relief, benefits for the unemployed, and strategic infrastructure investment to create jobs.” Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley chimed in that Congress should adopt a plan that “will put people back to work as quickly as possible.” The action plan adopted by the mayors calls for investments in local infrastructure projects “that are already planned and can be started quickly.” These would include road and bridge improvements, transit and high-speed rail projects, and water security development projects.

The mayors heartily endorsed the proposal of Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) which calls for almost \$40 billion in Federal investment in transportation improvements (see *EIR*, Oct. 19, 2001). Reid praised the mayors for beginning their conference on security, with a discussion on the economic stimulus package. “You understand more than anyone else,” he said, “that economic strength translates into security.” He told the mayors, “All across our nation, there are literally billions [actually, trillions — ed.] of dollars of unmet needs, for roads, waste water and drinking water systems, bridges, trains and transit

programs. . . . If we’re to accomplish the goal of promoting a strong national economy, the economic stimulus package must focus on the infrastructure work that is ready — ready right now.”

The key issue is the real economy. Senator Reid told the mayors that “while tax cuts are important, they do little for an American out of work. [Congress needs] to hear that extending unemployment benefits, while very important, is a bridge to nowhere if there isn’t a job at the other end.” Reid’s proposal points in the right direction, compared to the tax cuts pushed by Congressional Republicans and the White House. Only new job creation will generate the revenues that cities and counties need to provide the resources to defend the general welfare. However, the effectiveness of such a program will be limited by the degree to which it tries to function within the existing collapsing financial system. Only a complete bankruptcy-style reorganization of the entire economy will address the long-term problem that Reid and the mayors are facing.

## Senator Reid To Mayors: Build Infrastructure, Now

*Here are excerpts from the remarks of Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to the Oct. 24-25 emergency meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.*

I appreciate your support for my proposal to make transportation and water infrastructure investments a fundamental part of any stimulus package. All across our great nation there are literally billions of dollars in critical but unmet needs — for roads, waste water and drinking water systems, bridges, trains and transit programs. All of these projects are worthy. But if we’re to accomplish the goal of promoting a strong national economy, the economic stimulus package must focus on the infrastructure work that is ready — ready right now. To jump-start our economic engine, we must act on projects that are ready now, today. These projects need to be taken off the shelf, to begin construction and job creation immediately. Such projects need to be genuinely stimulative, fiscally responsible, and temporary, in order to meet the goals of this economic stimulus package.

Every mayor in this room knows these projects are out there. But we knew that prior to Sept. 11. One example: rural water assistance. The United States Department of Agriculture has a backlog of \$3.5 billion in approved, ready-to-go drinking water and waste water projects. They’re ready now. They were ready yesterday. Local fi-

nancing, environmental, and other requirements have been met on these projects. Again, all these projects lack is money — money to get them going now, certainly this year.

Examples like this exist for every major infrastructure segment of our economy. Many of these short-term projects would also provide the dual benefits of enhanced security and enhanced public health. Investment, for example, to convert drinking water facilities from chlorine gas — a chemical which could pose dangers to neighboring communities if released — to safer alternatives is just one example of the dual benefits offered by infrastructure investment. It would also confer public health benefits by decreasing harmful drinking water contaminants.

Infrastructure projects like these will get us the biggest bang for our buck. A dollar invested is a dollar spent. For every billion dollars we spend, we create roughly 42,000 jobs. Forty-two thousand people paying taxes, buying cars, buying refrigerators, buying homes. That’s why this infrastructure package is so important.

And as every mayor knows, you can’t import a road or water project. And as every mayor knows, these jobs are for American workers, which will invest in the safety of America’s infrastructure. And as every mayor knows, a system which supports all forms of commerce and which has been neglected for far too long. And as every mayor knows and as I know, most of the tax proposals now under consideration in Congress would get us little short-term benefit and would come at a huge long-term cost. And as every mayor knows, at a time when we can’t predict what the economy will be a year from now, we shouldn’t be mortgaging our future.