

STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR LOWELL WEICKER, JR.,
TRUST FOR AMERICA'S HEALTH BOARD PRESIDENT,
ON "READY OR NOT? PROTECTING THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH
IN THE AGE OF BIOTERRORISM -- 2004"

December 14, 2004, 10 am

- Thank you for joining us today for the release of the Trust for America's Health new report "Ready or Not: Protecting the Public's Health in the Age of Bioterrorism."
- This is the second year in a row we've examined the progress that has been made since September 11 and the subsequent anthrax tragedies in the nation's ability to respond to public health emergencies -- and the vulnerabilities that remain.
- When I was a Senator involved in the Watergate investigations, we believed in "following the money" to get to the bottom of things.
- We took that same approach in this study -- we tracked the almost \$1 billion per year given in federal funds to states since 2002, and the impact it has had on protecting the country from the threat of bioterrorism.
- Unfortunately, what we found is that three years after 9/11, many basic bioterrorism detection, diagnosis, and response capabilities are still not in place.
- States across the country are struggling to meet basic requirements and have inadequate resources to juggle the competing health priorities they face.
- I don't want anyone to get me wrong -- the nearly \$3 billion of federal funds appropriated to bioterrorism preparedness have definitely resulted in real improvements -- however, I would characterize it as *incremental progress* rather than the *substantial modernization* that the situation calls for.
- Some of the key areas of progress include: better response planning, improvements in public health labs, emergency communications systems,

and some “all-hazard” capabilities, such as improved ability to respond to a potential pandemic flu outbreak or other natural disasters.

- However, we have a very long way to go to reach adequate preparedness.
- We found that shifting federal priorities and programs have distracted from improving the basic backbone capabilities.
- There is insufficient accountability and coordination at the federal, state, and local levels. By-and-large, there is a lack of readiness to distribute the vaccine and antidote stockpile, upgrades for health tracking and warning systems have stalled, there is a public health workforce crisis, and preparedness for a chemical terrorism attack is lagging.
- Releasing findings of our report will make us pretty unpopular in some circles, and we aren't meaning to put the blame on public health professionals. They are true heroes and we are grateful for the vital part they play in keeping our homeland safe and healthy.
- But, we believe in calling it like I see it -- and Americans deserve to know how their tax dollars are being used and how protected they are.
- Thank you. Dr. Hearne will now talk more about the report and recommendations.

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