



State needs central anti-terror plan

By Stephen J. Adams

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At a recent public forum on defending against terrorism, senior officials from the Commonwealth and the City of Boston discussed the status of their efforts to prevent and respond to what was so recently unthinkable. We learned that a lot of progress has been made, but a nagging fear remains.

Boston Police Commissioner Paul Evans described the enhanced collaboration among state, city and federal law enforcement agencies that has emerged since September 11. State Public Health Commissioner Howard Koh spoke of the enormous and unexpected stresses placed on the public health system by the anthrax scare. He also noted, with understandable pride, that the system in place here in Massachusetts responded remarkably well.

Nonetheless, many people remain uneasy about the Commonwealth's progress in steeling itself against terror. A recent poll revealed that Massachusetts citizens are more concerned with domestic terrorism than about losing their jobs. And few of those polled are impressed with the state's efforts to date to respond to the new threat.

So why don't we feel safer? One reason may be the sense that all this activity is unconnected. There is no apparent state-wide anti-terror strategy to link the disparate activities of numerous agencies; a strategy that helps agency heads set priorities, gives form and focus to the countless coordinating meetings between agencies, and offers guidance to those outside government about how they fit into the plan. In short, what is missing is a Governor's Anti-Terror Strategy for Massachusetts.

As if the threat of domestic terror was not reason enough, the yawning state budget deficit adds even more urgency to the imperative for a state anti-terror strategy. We simply do not have money to waste. The Governor needs a means of setting priorities among domestic security investments like state police or public health specialists. She needs a way of separating the symbolic from the substantive. How much should we spend to make us *feel* safe (heavily-armed troopers at the airport), versus making us actually *more* safe (bioterrorism training)? And she needs a guide to determine the best way to fit the new anti-terror dollars coming from Washington into the state effort.

A well-articulated anti-terror strategy can also help the Commonwealth leverage the huge increase in security—related spending by private companies, hospitals and universities. And it can help the Governor communicate convincingly to citizens the state's anti-terror priorities, its strengths and weaknesses and steps being taken to fill security gaps.

Pioneer Institute's review of domestic security efforts around the state and nation indicate that at least four steps are critical to the development of a cohesive anti-terror strategy.

First, state government must conduct a candid assessment of Massachusetts' readiness to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks and publicize the report. Two months after September 11, the Governor of New Hampshire had completed and widely disseminated a preliminary but comprehensive evaluation of that State's anti-terror preparedness. (<http://www.state.nh.us/governor/preparedness.pdf>)

We must then identify what Arn Howitt, Director of the Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness at the Kennedy School, called "the seams" between public and private sector security efforts and establish mechanisms to tighten them. For

starters, ask private sector security professionals what guidance they need from the state to manage their own security responsibilities.

Next, identify opportunities for synergy with the private sector. The US Coast Guard is working with Maine's fishing industry to strengthen coastal monitoring. In Massachusetts, Massport summarily banished clambers from the clam flats around the airport, not only threatening the economic well-being of the clambers, but ignoring the potential value of clambers as partners in monitoring the shores around Logan.

The final piece is communication. Admit that the Commonwealth's anti-terror program is a work in progress. It took the U.S. government at least six months to respond to Pearl Harbor; Massachusetts cannot be expected to have its response to September 11 completed in just a few months. Still, one senior public safety official at the forum said that all that is left to be done is to effectively communicate Massachusetts' readiness to defend against terrorism. That is probably an overstatement. In any case, everyone can help make Massachusetts safer from terror. Just let us know the plan.

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