



## ***Direct from Shapiro***

### **A Legislative Update From the Capitol** **SENATOR FLORENCE SHAPIRO**

**February 5, 2002**

Chair, State Affairs Committee

Member, Education Committee, Redistricting Committee, Intergovernmental Relations Committee, Joint Select Committee on School Finance  
Member, Legislative Audit Committee, Legislative Budget Board, Governor's Task Force on Homeland Security

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### **Securing the Homeland in Texas**

September 11, 2001 was a day that forever changed our lives individually and collectively as Americans. As part of our response, Governor Rick Perry formed the Task Force on Homeland Security, and for the past four months this task force worked to assess and improve Texas' ability to detect, deter and respond to terrorism. As a result, we forwarded 44 recommendations to the Governor which will further improve our state's level of preparedness.

As a member of the task force, I was pleased to find that Texas is one of the best prepared states in the country. Yet, we identified three areas of particular concern to me; communication between responding agencies, proper training and equipping of first responders, and security along our international border.

First, the lines of communication between the numerous state, federal, and local agencies must be improved, especially agencies within our public health system. The task force recommended connecting all local health departments through development of the Health Alert Network and the Preparedness Coordination Council. Once in place, the HAN and the PCC will allow local health departments to communicate threats in real time, better enabling the state to contain and treat any outbreak that might occur.

Second, the training and equipping of our first responders -- police officers, fire fighters, and emergency medical personnel -- to react to "all hazards" must be an essential part of providing for the safety and security of our citizens. Additional resources will improve the local communities' ability to respond to the possible release of a chemical or biological disease agent, as well as any other event involving mass casualties. As our homeland's front line of defense, they require the best resources to provide for our security.

Third, procedures and facilities along the Texas-Mexico border must be reviewed to determine whether we have a seamless security system while allowing for an expedited flow of commerce. The Task Force recommended a thorough review of the assets and needs associated with each border port of entry. We must secure federal funding for these ports of entry.

Funding for these recommendations must be partnered within the federal, state and local governments. While these suggestions will better enable Texas to detect and respond to terrorism, they will also enhance the daily functions of these agencies and the services they provide to the public.

The events of September 11th were certainly a shock to all Americans. However after a great national tragedy, our community has come together for the betterment of our state and our country. The personal and economic loss was devastating. But the steadfast resolve of our citizens has already shown that we will recover, and Texas' response is stronger and more resolute than ever.

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