

The CBW Chronicle

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A periodic newsletter about international and domestic events related to the control and elimination of chemical and biological weapons

New Chief Appointed to Lead Chemical Ban Organization

After a rocky first half of 2002, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) selected Argentine diplomat Rogelio Pfirter to take its helm as director-general on 25 July. Pfirter stressed that securing the dues owed by delinquent member states is his first priority. The 145-member OPCW monitors compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, overseeing the inspections conducted at industrial and military sites of member countries. In 2001, however, the group ran so short of funds that it was unable to conduct 35 percent of its planned inspections at chemical weapons storage sites and 43 percent of those planned for industrial facilities monitored under the treaty.

Financial mismanagement was one of the allegations leveled against Pfirter's predecessor, Jose Bustani of Brazil, whose removal the United States spearheaded in the early part of this year. What began as a behind-the-scenes diplomatic effort to persuade a controversial leader to step down ended in April as a highly publicized showdown in the Hague. Ultimately, Bustani was dismissed from his position on 22 April following a vote by the organization's membership. Forty-eight countries voted in favor of the US motion calling for Bustani's removal, seven voted against and 43 abstained. The divided nature of the vote reflected the highly charged atmosphere that had developed as scathing accusations were traded in the media.

Bustani assumed the position of director-general in 1997. He was re-elected to a second term in 2000. However, in late 2001, the Bush administration began indicating that it had a number of problems with the directions in which Bustani was taking the organization. The United States charged Bustani with mismanagement, the undertaking of "ill-conceived initiatives," and undermining morale in the organization. Indicating that it was not alone in its opinion, the US attempted to use back channel negotiations to persuade Bustani to resign.

Denying the allegations against him, Bustani sought to defend his position publicly. In the Brazilian press, he stated that upon assuming his position at the OPCW, he found a "poorly prepared organization" and that if he were removed, it would cause a serious crisis because the "staff there are not skilled." He characterized the US attempt to remove him as indicative of a unilateralist bent in the Bush administration. After losing a vote of no-confidence in the Executive Council of the organization, Bustani then called for a vote from the full membership.

The United States pays about 20 percent of the organization's \$60 million annual budget. Following Bustani's dismissal, the United States paid this year's assessment in full on 15 May 2002. American officials issued statements in support of Pfirter's appointment, stressing his experience in posts such as Argentina's ambassador to the United Kingdom, as well as undersecretary for foreign policy. ☞

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Possible Methods to Expand Smallpox Vaccine Supply Explored

The eradication of naturally occurring smallpox in most of the world led the United States to stop universal vaccination of its citizens in 1972. Thirty years later, the deaths of five individuals from an anthrax attack and worrying intelligence reports have renewed focus on the highly contagious and frequently fatal disease's potential as a bioterrorist weapon. The Department of Health and Human Services is investigating various ways to ensure an adequate supply of smallpox vaccine. Dilution of the existing inventories of vaccine is one method being explored.

In the 25 April issue of *New England Journal of Medicine*, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) announced encouraging clinical trial results. The trial, conducted by St. Louis University, Baylor College of Medicine, the University of Maryland, and the University of Rochester, supported the feasibility of diluting the existing stockpile of 15 million vaccine doses. Full-strength vaccine or versions at a 1:5 or 1:10 dilution were administered to partici-

pants. The study found very little difference between the three dilution levels. Overall, 665 of the trial's 680 participants indicated an immune response to the vaccine on the first vaccination attempt, evidenced by a welt at the injection point. Even the 1:10 dilution induced a take in 98 percent of recipients.

Those who did not show a response on the first attempt received a second injection. Of these fifteen subjects, half developed a welt when vaccinated a second time. Most of those who did not show a response revealed that they simply may not remember being vaccinated in the early seventies.

The NIAID study helped dispel previous pessimism surrounding vaccine dilution. A smaller pilot study conducted in 2000 found that a 1:10 dilution immunized only 70 percent of subjects. Comparing the current and the previous studies, NIAID noted that the earlier study's vaccine lot contained a lower concentration of vaccinia virus (the vaccine's active agent) than the lot used in the recent trial. The disparity may explain the much lower success rate in the pilot study.

Further tests are currently being conducted on both the government stocks as well as those acquired from French company Aventis Pasteur. (See story, p. 3.) The results of these studies will likely figure into the ongoing debate regarding the US policy on smallpox vaccination. Both the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and the National Vaccine Advisory Committee voted on 17 July to recommend that a limited number of emergency and medical personnel be vaccinated in each state. Those individuals would then investigate possible outbreaks and procure additional vaccine, in the case of an attack. Smallpox vaccine can be effective against the disease if administered within 2-3 days after the initial infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the White House will review the recommendation before any final decision is made.

Prior to recent discussions, the CDC's Smallpox Response Plan had called for a "ring" vaccination program, which would target those most likely to contract the disease from initial victims. Such ring vaccinations helped to contain outbreaks as the World Health Organization stamped out smallpox's last vestiges in the

155 Million New Smallpox Doses to be Produced by 2003

Vaccine dilution is only one way the US is looking to increase its smallpox vaccine supply. UK-based biopharmaceutical company Acambis Inc., will also produce a new smallpox vaccine prepared in a more sterile environment than current stocks.

The current vaccine supply was created by infecting calves' skin with the vaccinia virus, then acquiring infected material to incorporate in the vaccine, similar to the technique used by smallpox vaccine discoverer Edward Jenner in 1796. By contrast, Acambis will produce its vaccine from a purified strain of vaccinia under controlled conditions in tissue cultures in Baxter's European production facility.

Acambis, along with US-based subcontractor Baxter International, Inc., will receive \$428 million to produce 155 million doses by the end of 2002. Vaccine production, last done by Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, halted in 1983. *z*

1970s. Some researchers and members of the public health community now question whether that would be sufficient to contain an outbreak. They argue that modern transportation could spread the disease across the country before initial detection, making ring efforts essentially impossible.

The alternative would be to reinstitute the US program for vaccinating almost all citizens. Universal vaccination, however, is a highly controversial approach. Experts like D.A. Henderson, who spearheaded efforts to eradicate smallpox in the 60s and 70s, have expressed doubt that the benefits of universal vaccination would outweigh the vaccine's social costs. Vaccination often yields flulike symptoms, including high fevers, which may in themselves significantly burden the public health system. Experts further estimate that vaccination would cause an estimated 1 to 2 deaths per million recipients, particularly among people with weak immune systems. Thus, under a widespread prophylactic vaccination plan, literally hundreds could die from reactions to the vaccine.

A compromise proposal is to make the vaccine available to any American citizen willing to give informed consent.

Among possible biological threats, smallpox is feared primarily for its transmissibility. The disease spreads quickly from person to person through direct contact with bodily fluids and through aerosolized droplets of saliva which can be transmitted through close contact and coughing and sneezing. Also, statistics from past outbreaks indicate 30 percent of those infected die from the disease, and those who do not frequently suffer severe scarring.

While smallpox was eradicated worldwide in 1980, the World Health Organization authorized both the United States and Soviet Union to retain supplies for research purposes at the CDC in Atlanta and the Institute of Virus Preparations in Moscow. High-ranking defectors later revealed that the Soviets undertook a massive program to weaponize smallpox, violating the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention by producing and retaining a large stockpile. *z*

US, Canada to Cooperate on Smallpox Vaccine Development

On 12 April, the US Department of Defense and the Canadian Department of National Defence announced that they had signed the first agreement that commits the two countries to collaborating on a specific area of chemical-biological-radiological defense. The groundwork for this cooperation was laid through a June 2000 memorandum of understanding signed by the two countries and the United Kingdom designed to increase the commonality of resources shared by the three allies.

This year, tests will be done on the US military stockpile of vaccine and the vaccinia immune globulin (used to treat adverse reactions to inoculations). The resulting data will then be transmitted to both the US Food and Drug Administration and Canada's Health Canada so that the two agencies may issue joint licensure. In addition to enabling greater interoperability between the two militaries, the agreement allows the countries to combine their human and financial resources and avoid overlap in their efforts. *z*

Additional Stock of Smallpox Vaccine Found in Pennsylvania Freezer

French pharmaceutical conglomerate Aventis Pasteur, parent company of US-based Aventis, announced 15 May that it would donate its stock of approximately 75-90 million doses of smallpox vaccine to the US government. The stocks have an estimated commercial value of \$150 million. Aventis is also producing a new cell-culture based smallpox vaccine, which it expects to release in Europe by the end of this year.

Produced around 1958, the donated doses have been stored in a freezer at Aventis' Swiftwater, Pennsylvania, plant for about thirty years. Because of their age,

the National Institutes of Health initiated a research study comparing their effectiveness to existing stocks. Preliminary tests indicated that they remain potent.

Aventis came close to destroying the vaccines. Because the smallpox threat had been thought long over, Aventis began consulting with the CDC in 1999 to develop protocols for destroying its vaccine stocks. After the September 11 attacks, however, the discussion shifted to the vaccines' usefulness in the event of a bioterrorist attack. Due to the supply's potential national security value, Aventis transferred it to a "secure location" in October 2001. *z*

Pentagon Announces Method for Pueblo Weapon Destruction

Undersecretary of Defense Pete Aldridge has given his approval to plans to use neutralization biotreatment, rather than incineration, to dispose of 2,600 tons of mustard agent stored in 780,000 munitions at Colorado's Pueblo Chemical Weapons Depot. The depot houses 8.5 percent of the nation's chemical weapons stockpile. The decision is expected to end a debate that has pitted the Army's chemical weapons destruction program against local opponents of its baseline incineration technology.

The Pueblo stockpile consists of 105mm and 155mm shells and 4.2 inch cartridges, which contain not only mustard agent, but also propellant and explosiveto spread the agent (the weapon's "energetics"). Rather than burning the weapons, neutralization biotreatment entails several non-combustion steps. The energetics and agent are first separated and each submitted to chemical processing by water neutralization. The resulting less toxic chemicals are then fed to bacteria in a common bioreactor tank, yielding dried salts, water, and an organic sludge suitable for disposal. Along the way, metal weapons parts are separately treated and decontaminated. Other wastes are also handled without incineration.

For the past decade, a number of environmental and local advocacy groups, including Greenpeace and the Kentucky-based Chemical Weapons Working Group, have vehemently opposed burning the weapons. They have alleged that incineration could lead to release not only of agent, but also of dioxin, a carcinogenic incineration byproduct thought to accumulate in the food chain. Supporters

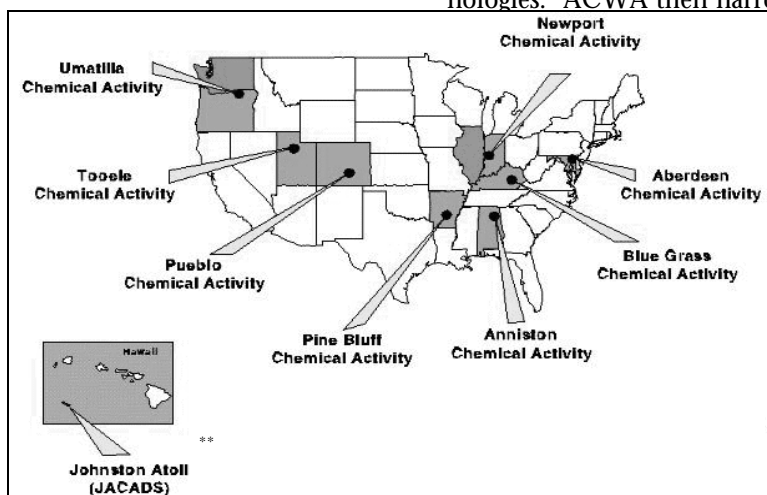
have answered that baseline incineration employs numerous safeguards and alarms to prevent accidental release of chemical agent, and that stack emissions fall well within Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. They have also noted that because incineration is an established technology, quickly implementing it reduces the ongoing risk from leaving agents and munitions in their current decaying state.

The Army's Program Manager for Chemical Demilitarization (PMCD) has previously been responsible for the building and operation of chemical weapons destruction facilities. However, on 15 July, Senators Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Ben Night-horse Campbell (R-CO) attached an amendment to the 2003 Defense Appropriations Act that would shift responsibility for facilities where neutralization becomes the selected destruction method. If the bill is passed with the amendment intact, oversight for Pueblo and Kentucky's Bluegrass Army Depot—another likely candidate for neutralization—would be transferred from PMCD to the Pentagon's Assembled Chemical Weapons Assessment (ACWA) Program.

In 1996, Congress required the Department of Defense to study alternatives to baseline incineration and established ACWA to survey a range of technologies. ACWA then narrowed the list of candi-

dates for demonstration projects, identifying options for final approval by the Pentagon. McConnell and Campbell argue that ACWA therefore has greater familiarity with neutralization than PMCD. McConnell is also a vocal critic of the PMCD, accusing it of mismanagement and overspending.

ACWA is also required to solicit public input on potential destruction techniques.



Map of Chemical Weapons Storage Sites in the United States

** Destruction of all weapons stored at the JACADS site on Johnston Atoll was completed in November 2000. The Johnston Atoll site had contained 3.5 percent of the nation's stockpile of chemical weapons, principally nerve and blister agents.

It has sponsored public fora in communities where chemical demilitarization facilities are under consideration, including Pueblo.

Mitretek, Inc., the Pentagon contractor that serves as Program Manager for ACWA, evaluated and demonstrated several model incineration and neutralization technologies for both Pueblo and Blue Grass. The alternative technologies ACWA selects must be as safe and cost-effective as incineration; capable of completing destruction as quickly as incineration or by April 2007; and capable of meeting all federal and state laws related to the use of the technology.

ACWA originally considered four methods for Pueblo—two involving incineration and two involving water-based neutralization. In May 1998, the group narrowed the choices to two: neutralization followed by further chemical treatment for nerve and mustard agents and neutralization followed by biodegradation for mustard agents only. The latter method will be employed at Pueblo.

This is not the first time the Pentagon has selected neutralization for its chemical demilitarization program. In 1999, the Pentagon awarded a contract for the construction of a pilot neutralization plant to dispose of chemical agents stored in ton containers at Maryland's Aberdeen Proving Ground and Indiana's Newport Chemical Depot. Bulk storage presents fewer technical challenges and entails a simpler destruction process

than the one approved for Pueblo.

Under the Chemical Weapons Convention, the United States and other signatories have agreed to destroy their stockpiles by April 2007, ten years after the treaty's entry into force. However, delays in program implementation will likely require the United States to take advantage of an allowable five year extension of this deadline.

Construction of the Pueblo pilot plant is projected to be completed by 2005. The actual neutralization of the stockpile may not begin until one to two years later.

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Test Burns Begin at Umatilla

On 31 July, the Army conducted its initial tests of the first of four incinerators that will be used to destroy nerve agent at Oregon's Umatilla Chemical Depot. More than 3,700 tons of VX, sarin and mustard gas are stored in bunkers around the facility. The tests were free to move forward once Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber verified that he found communities surrounding the depot sufficiently prepared in the event of an emergency. He did so in early June.

A dry cleaning solvent and a degreasing agent, substances that are tougher to destroy than the poison gases, are used to test the effectiveness and safe operation of the incinerators. Actual burning of nerve agent will not begin until May 2003, if the tests are completed successfully.

Kitzhaber dismissed a last minute change in the destruction method for mustard gas. A possible change to neutralization had been suggested for safety reasons by some local activists and financial concerns by Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations and Environment Mario Fiori. Oregon state officials opted not to make the change, citing concerns about the lateness of the change, the quantities of water it would take to accomplish neutralization and the lack of facilities to treat contaminated wastewater afterwards.

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Oversight of US Chemical Demilitarization Efforts Consolidated

On 13 December 2001, oversight of the Army's Chemical Weapons Disposal Program was transferred from the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations and Environment, Dr. Mario Fiori.

Previously the two offices had shared responsibility for the program. Prior to this change, the Installations and Environment office had been responsible for management of environmental, safety, occupational health and chemical stockpile emergency preparedness activi-

ties. Under the consolidation, it will assume the overall management and execution of the program as well.

Created in 1985, the Chemical Weapons Disposal Program is responsible for safely destroying all chemical agents and weapons stored at the eight sites in the US. (See map, page 4.) The program also oversees disposal of recovered weapons and former weapons production sites. However, the program has encountered problems recently, as its projected costs have spiraled more than 1400 percent since its creation.

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Anniston Residents to Receive Personal Protective Gear

An ongoing struggle between Alabama Governor Don Siegleman and the federal government over the destruction of chemical weapons housed at Anniston Army Depot took a step toward resolution on 17 July. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced it would provide \$5 million to purchase protective hoods to be distributed to residents living near the facility. The Anniston depot is home to 2,200 tons of chemical agents, constituting seven percent of the total US chemical weapons stockpile.

Concerns over accidents or leakage during the destruction of these weapons, scheduled to begin in September, led Siegleman to file a lawsuit in February to prevent the opening of the incineration facility until safety issues were addressed. Although FEMA initially agreed to provide the hoods in March, disputes have continued over training, funding issues and modifications to destruction methods and timetables at Anniston.

In particular, government officials and concerned citizens have strongly criticized the Army's plan to proceed with a new method of incineration for some sarin-filled rockets. Typically, liquid sarin is drained from a rocket and then burned at a very high temperature. However, the sarin in about 3,600 of the total 28,000 rockets stored at Anniston has hardened into crystal form, which makes draining impossible. Instead, the Army has proposed a "chop and drop" process wherein the rockets will be hewn into pieces in a chopping machine, then dropped into a furnace and incinerated. The proposal states 34 rockets per hour will be destroyed, although one rocket per hour was the fastest speed reached with the same procedure at another destruction facility in Tooele, Utah. The Alabama Department of Environmental Management is reviewing the plan.

While incineration has been used successfully at other areas such as Tooele, its proposed use at Alabama's Anniston Army Depot is the first to be performed in a fairly densely populated region, evincing protest from local officials and residents. Over 72,000 people live

within nine miles of the Anniston facility. Opponents of the current destruction schedule say present safety and health precautions will not adequately protect residents if a chemical accident should occur.

Initial plans called for citizens to close and tape all doors, windows, and skylights where gas could infiltrate homes in the event of an accidental release. Local residents found this recommendation to be inadequate, citing instances where they might not be at home when a leak occurred and thus left unprotected.

After the March decision granting the hood money, Siegleman withdrew his lawsuit. In April, however, FEMA stipulated that citizens be informed that research indicates that sealing oneself inside—the so-called "sheltering in place" described above—would offer more protection than using the protective hoods. State and county officials balked at this, along with 14 other restrictions. They protested that such a message would be confusing for local residents, and the governor renewed his legal efforts to prevent the destruction facility from beginning operations.

After further discussion between federal and state officials, Alabama submitted a program to FEMA that described how it would train the residents who receive the hoods. Cheaper and less complicated than military-style gas masks, the hoods are considered easier to use.

The next possible stumbling block for Anniston may be Siegleman's call for FEMA to outfit 37 county schools in the area with airtight rooms and air pumps and filters. FEMA has disputed the need for the costly equipment.

In May testimony before the Senate Appropriations committee, FEMA director Joe Allbaugh stated he believes his agency should be relieved of oversight of emergency preparations for communities near chemical weapons destruction facilities. Full responsibility would then rest with the Army, which currently oversees the destruction programs and emergency preparations on bases where destruction facilities are located. ☞

FEMA director Joe Allbaugh believes his agency should be relieved of oversight of emergency preparations for communities near chemical weapons destruction facilities.



Chem-Bio Blurbs: Recent developments in the field

Gerberding assumes helm of CDC

3 July: President Bush appointed Julie Gerberding, MD, MPH, to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, filling the position left vacant by Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, who left the CDC at the end of March. Formerly the acting deputy director of the CDC's National Center for Infectious Diseases, Gerberding has been leading efforts to prepare for biological terrorism and had an active role in the investigation into the anthrax attacks last fall. As the new director, Gerberding will be responsible for balancing the more traditional public health responsibilities of the \$6.8 billion dollar institution with new initiatives for bioterrorism prevention and response. *z*

Lugar amendment seeks release of funds for Russian CW destruction plant

31 July: Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) attached an amendment to the Defense Appropriations bill passed by the Senate in late July that would grant a permanent waiver of certification in regards to funds targeted for the construction of a chemical weapons destruction facility at Shchuchye, Russia. Current congressional requirements dictate that the administration must annually certify that Russia has met a series of preconditions in order to receive certain types of disarmament assistance. The waiver would free up millions of dollars that have been on hold for Shchuchye in recent years, including \$50 million allocated in the FY02 defense budget. Shchuchye is home to almost 15 percent of Russia's stockpile of chemical weapons. Granting of the waiver could still be challenged in the House of Representatives. *z*

Group prepares to discuss free flow of scientific information

27 July: In response to a request from the American Society for Microbiology (ASM), the National Academy of Sciences will convene a forum to examine whether the scientific community should rethink the degree of detail published in studies that could be used by individuals seeking to mount a bioterrorist attack. ASM was concerned by authors' requests that portions of their articles be omitted before being published in the organization's journals to prevent misuse. However, many scientists worry that such restraint will stifle progress by not allowing researchers to build on each other's work. *z*

Scientists assemble polio virus from component parts

19 July: Scientists at Stony Brook University in New York created the first synthetic polio virus from bits of DNA sequencing ordered from commercial sources. The researchers wished to draw attention to the possibility that in the future, terrorists may seek to create lethal biological agent strains in a laboratory in the same manner. Other scientific experts, countered that the polio genome has significantly fewer base pairs (7,500) than viruses like smallpox, which has 185,000. Base pairs are the building blocks that must be reassembled to build the genome. *z*

CDC celebrates unveiling of top of the line toxin lab

19 July: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) unveiled a new toxin laboratory in Chamblee, Georgia that could be central to investigations in the event of a terrorist attack using chemical weapons. Outfitted with top-of-the-line equipment, the toxin lab would be able to detect what substances were used out of 120 different chemical agents, and what exposure levels might have resulted. The previous CDC facilities at which such work would have been undertaken were older and in poor condition, raising concerns about contamination of the work. The US military has labs of similar design and technological advancement, but the lab at Chamblee will be the primary civilian government facility of its type. *z*

Editor's Note

Be careful what you wish for. Soon after the creation of the Office of Homeland Security last fall, some voices in Congress said it was n't enough. If an *office* for homeland security were a good idea, would a cabinet-level *department* not be an even better one?

There was reason to question the potential efficacy of Governor Tom Ridge's office in coordinating the numerous federal entities that play parts in keeping US citizens safe from terror on home soil. Without the authority and implied backing to manage resources and cut redundant programs, the office had few real ways to shape the activities that constitute homeland security.

And so, a chorus of congressional voices sang the praises of a new department. Initially, and wisely, the Bush administration balked. Ari Fleischer chastised the voices, saying, "...creating a Cabinet post doesn't solve anything. The White House needs a coordinator to work with the agencies wherever they are." Only two weeks later, however, Fleischer found himself saying that where those agencies were going to be was in the brand new Department of Homeland Security.

Federal agencies with missions that included tasks integral to homeland security were to be excised from their current departments and brought together into as a new entity that would coordinate activities, enhance communication and save money. So it would seem the voices got what they wanted.

Upon digesting the proposal, however, some other voices—belonging to staffers and journalists, government bureaucrats and talking heads—began piping up and asking the hard questions: What would happen to the core non-homeland security roles? The Coast Guard's activities in search and rescue following accidents at sea or in drug interdiction? FEMA's roles in natural disaster relief?

And what about the wealth of federal offices and assets with equally as much—if not more—connection to homeland

security that weren't included in the new department? The CIA and FBI, much maligned for their lack of communication, were not subsumed, despite the fact that improved interconnection is one of the reasons touted for the department's creation. There may have been good reasons to exempt them from inclusion, but their absence leaves the argument that reorganization will result in a coordinated and focused effort ringing hollow.

The potential savings that the Bush administration predicted also seem to be in dispute. The Congressional Budget Office says that the reorganization of the grab-bag of agencies that will make up the new department will cost between \$3-4 billion in the first two years alone—above and beyond the billions it will cost to run it. And there is no way to put a figure on what it will take to successfully complete the daunting task of combining offices with different cultures and operational set-ups. That could be the greatest cost of all in this endeavor: focusing thousands of man-hours on how to assemble a new bureaucracy, rather than on how to keep our country safe.

There is no doubt that the Office of Homeland Security, as it stood last fall, was lacking. First and foremost, it required budget authority and the support to use it. Governor Ridge and his staff needed to know that they wouldn't encounter congressional resistance when they sought to cut redundant pet programs or shuffle needed resources from one favored program to one that was less so. Maybe that wouldn't have been enough—but what it *would* have been is worth a try. It wouldn't have taken a massive change in the federal bureaucratic structure, it wouldn't have taken an outlay of \$3-4 billion dollars.

It is probably too late. The Department of Homeland Security marches ahead, over all the misgivings and reasonable qualms. And who in this election year dares to stand in front of their constituency and say something negative about a proposal containing the buzz words "homeland security"? Yet, Congress should. It could start with those original voices using those three words so infrequently heard in Washington, DC.:

"I was wrong." ☺

About the Newsletter, the Stimson Center, and its CBW Programming

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