



Homeland
Security

July 13, 2009

The Honorable Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Burgess:

Thank you for your April 17, 2009 letter regarding the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) risk assessment that was released to our state, local, and tribal partners on April 7. I understand your concerns, and I am pleased to respond to them.

As you know, DHS takes the mission of preventing attacks on our homeland very seriously, and we remain committed to reducing threats posed by foreign and domestic terrorists. I have pledged that sharing information with local law enforcement partners would be a guiding principle for the Department as we work to fulfill our mission.

Accordingly, this Department will share situational awareness information with state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies well before a specific threat to our homeland becomes imminent. As a former United States Attorney, state Attorney General, and Governor, I know firsthand that information sharing is critical to effective Federal, state, and local partnerships.

At the same time, this Department does not, and will not target, for information gathering or enforcement purposes, individuals or groups based on their political beliefs. We do, and will continue to, target individuals and groups that engage in criminal or violent activity and pose a threat to our communities. That is what was intended by this assessment, which was one of a series that also included a January 2009 report on left-wing extremism and its threat to cyber security.

As I have said, this report was poorly written and was not approved by senior leadership prior to its release. I was also particularly troubled that the issues raised by DHS's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties were not resolved prior to the assessment's release. We have now instituted more rigorous internal controls to address these types of concerns and to ensure that any product meets the high standards we have set for ourselves. You should also be aware that the report is no longer available on the Department's intelligence-sharing websites or portals.

I also want to address your concerns about the report's reference to veterans. The report specifically discussed white supremacist and other extremist groups who seek to target our veterans for recruitment. It is our duty to make sure that our returning veterans have the health care, education, and job training opportunities they deserve so they can make a successful transition back to their lives as civilians. If we fail to do so, these groups will continue to target them.

We honor the military and our veterans at DHS. In fact, we employ 44,000 of them—26 percent of our workforce. No one should doubt my personal, or this Department's, commitment to the men and women who wear our country's uniform. I have met with the leadership of the American Legion and have apologized for any offense to our veterans caused by this report. I am committed to working closely with veterans groups, such as the American Legion, to establish an even stronger partnership between DHS and our Nation's veterans.

Thank you again for contacting me. I look forward to a successful and productive partnership with Congress, and I encourage you to contact me at (202) 282-8203 if you have additional concerns or thoughts on this matter.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Napolitano', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Janet Napolitano