

Security begins at home

Local officials call for national drive to meet the homeland security challenge.

With Washington self-absorbed in a turf-fight smack-down over the reorganization of federal agencies into a new cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security, forgive us for noting once more that the front-line troops of domestic defense—police officers, firefighters, and health care providers, among others—are actually employed by state and local governments. The Bush administration has been notably slow in figuring out how to get resources to these “first responders.”

To spotlight the local aspect of homeland security, the DLC invited Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Baltimore Mayor Martin O’Malley, and King County, Wash., Executive Ron Sims to address the topic at its National Conversation in New York City. The panel was moderated by Progressive Policy Institute President Will Marshall.

Kilpatrick talked about the special problems posed by Detroit’s international border with Canada and his decision to create his own local homeland secu-

urity strategy, based on recommendations from PPI. “In Detroit we have created an alliance with the counties around us, with Canada, and with the Canadian province of Ontario, which now makes us international partners in the war against terrorism,” Kilpatrick said.

O’Malley laid out seven steps every local government should take to improve its preparedness for terrorist attacks and argued for an urgent effort to overcome the federal-state bureaucratic barriers to get help immediately to first responders. “We have a responsibility to reshape the dysfunctional federal, state, and local relationship,” he said. “It’s not serving us well, it’s failing us. And in the meantime, ter-

rorists are here, and they’re trying to kill us.”

Sims discussed the special problems of security in transportation systems and echoed O’Malley’s call for an entirely different way of thinking about different levels of government in metropolitan areas. “We’re in a metropolitan age in the 21st century, and we need to abandon 20th century terms defining ourselves politically or operationally,” Sims said.

Marshall summed up the panel by observing that in homeland security, “We’ve got to work out an intelligent division of labor between what Washington does, and the cities and counties do, and the regions do. So we’re about to embark on a tremendous adventure in federalism.” ♦



A CALL TO ACTION: Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Baltimore Mayor Martin O’Malley, and King County, Wash., Executive Ron Sims shared security strategies at the National Conversation.



PLAYbook

A menu of ideas for state and local elected officials.

Fighting Medical Inflation by Reducing Poor Quality Care

NEW DEM PLAY || Cutting medical costs by collaborating to improve health care quality

WHERE IT’S WORKING || California, Florida, and many Midwestern states

PLAYERS || State and local officials

With rapidly escalating health care costs, state and local governments face tough budget choices. New Democrats must modernize programs to get more value from current health care spending.

Through the leadership of the Midwest Business Group on Health, both private and public

employers in 11 states have charted a new course for purchasing health care. The group estimates that poor-quality care accounts for 30 percent of all direct health care outlays today.

To improve the quality of care, they suggest people:

- Analyze health care data to identify high-priority problems.

- Measure the performance of plans and providers, engaging them in improvement programs.

- Share performance information with employees, beneficiaries, and the public at large.

- Reward high-quality providers through public recognition, shared-savings contracts, and other incentives.

A conversation with...

Martha Coakley >> on prosecuting crime

As the district attorney of Middlesex County, Mass., Martha Coakley represents one quarter of the state's population, including the Boston metropolitan area. Her district's 54 cities and towns all have their own laws and police departments, and working with them all requires a progressive approach. With a reputation as a tough prosecutor, Coakley relies on both prevention and punishment—with solid results. She talked to BLUEPRINT about her crime-fighting techniques.

BP > What challenges do you face in prosecuting criminals in Middlesex County?

MC: Budget cuts are on everyone's minds lately, and trying to provide adequate services with a very limited budget is a real challenge. The assistant district attorney position here is a great job that starts at \$35,000 a year, but a lot of people just out of law school cannot afford to take a job in the public sector.

BP > Some people think of crime as a "Republican issue." How do you respond to that?

MC: I think this has been a real concern among some of us Democratic district attorneys. In a state like Massachusetts that's known for its very liberal policies, some of us sitting as district attorneys feel that law enforcement, as a priority, gets back-burnered. My response to that is that public safety should be a bipartisan issue. It is one that is funded and talked about by both parties and the public at large, and many issues are complex—such as locking people up versus putting money into rehabilitation programs.

I am a big advocate of understanding the crime and knowing that one size for punishment does not fit all. What is the difference between someone who abuses his wife or one who robs a bank or one who is addicted to drugs? The behavior and history behind these crimes

varies quite a bit.

There are clearly people for whom a life of crime is easier, and if they are a danger to society, they probably should be locked up for a long while. But with others, that may not be the best or most cost-effective answer. I think we have to understand the crime and then use our dollars accordingly.

BP > How do you balance the demands of Democrats and Republicans in Massachusetts?

MC: I have an obligation as a Democrat to address the concerns of the party, but my primary obligation is to keep people safe. Prevention is sometimes appropriate, prosecution and punishment is sometimes appropriate. But we have to see what the impact of any potential policy is on our whole community before implementing it.

Massachusetts has one foot in the 21st century and one foot in the 18th. Some of our old statutes and notions can get in the way of more progressive policies that we need to address our current problems.

BP > How have you handled juvenile delinquency in Middlesex County?

MC: We're not looking to charge more kids; we're looking to help more kids before they get into trouble. We've expanded our truancy roundtables, where failure to come to school is a clear red flag that there is a bigger problem. If you look at crime statistics, you'll see that before they committed that crime, there were certain patterns in place—they weren't going to school, they weren't getting support.

Also, post-9/11, we're developing a set of materials called "Participating in Democracy." It is aimed at the middle school group and is something teachers can use to bring back the civics notion that I think has really been neglected in the past 30 years. If this works, people are



MARTHA COAKLEY's moderate approach to prosecution blends historic traditions with progressive policies.

going to live in safer communities, I think.

BP > You are known as an advocate of prevention programs. Why are they a critical part of fighting crime?

MC: You never know what you prevent. It's hard to measure the success of prevention programs. But it's hard to argue with common sense if you look at the patterns of people who are already imprisoned for crimes they've committed.

I think if we are ever going to go beyond what I call the 1950s mentality—police arrest people, we convict them, they never get out of jail—it means working with communities to understand where these crimes come from. Some crimes are not preventable, and I don't think I'm a Pollyanna about it. But it's important to work with doctors, social workers, people in other disciplines ... and try to come up with something in public safety to address what we know to be potential problems. ♦