

## **Preparedness lies within our own control**

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"Are we safer five years later?" It is the question that begins every interview or conversation these days. Five years ago our nation lost its safety naivete as violence came here, to American soil, at the hands of a ruthless enemy we scarcely knew. This year as we reflect upon the horrors of Sept. 11, and the destruction wrought by a hurricane whose impact still looms large, we find ourselves confused by a series of violent crimes, stretched by expensive fuel, troubled about the turbid state of the world, and worried about a pandemic we can predict but cannot see.

To be sure, much has been spent; some with great impact on tools, systems and technology that change the probabilities in our favor. Unfortunately, preparedness (and most security measures) tends to be episodic -- reacting to whatever the last problem was. This produces what amounts to "random acts of preparedness." The principal problem with this approach is that it leaves great gaps in preparedness, fosters cynicism and ignores a smart enemy that changes tactics with each improvement implemented by the good guys. Confusion also reigns as to what must be done, who must do it and who should pay for it. Many expect that some government agency will ride in like the cavalry to save the day, not recognizing or perhaps not admitting that it takes time to muster and train the troops, saddle the horses (assuming they don't have to buy or rent them), and ride to the rescue.

We shouldn't need someone to tell us to keep tuned to the news, to keep an eye toward the sky and to pay attention to world affairs. But we do. We should know that there are some 53-armed conflicts raging around the globe besides the two we are involved in. But we do not. We should understand that many in the world hate us not for what we do or who we are, but for what we stand for. We should understand that many of those who hate us most do so because they have the least. Just as heat, hunger, hatred and being held hostage by circumstance breed violence in faraway places, those same factors can breed violence here.

All too often the business of preparedness is one of frightening people from inaction. Inertia seems to be the greatest obstacle to awareness, to understanding and ultimately to preparedness. Being prepared in this century is not fundamentally different from being prepared in the last century, except for one glaring truth: The technologies that make us all more efficient and effective also become force multipliers for a determined enemy. Just-in-time systems, which work well during normal times, tend to fail with troubling consequences when something -- or someone -- disturbs the systems they rely on.

The problem is figuring out what we should be prepared for. The list of catastrophes, disasters, dastardly deeds and vulnerabilities that could yield trouble is long, expensive and unpleasant. The calculus of preparedness is complex, time consuming, unsettling and hard. It isn't hard to imagine a community response of denial, depression or distress when faced with the list. But that is not our way. Preparedness lies less in the actions of government than in our own actions.

We don't need a gilded commission to tell us what many Hoosiers already know: Preparedness and safety begin at home, with the family, with the people we have relationships with. People we can call in times of great joy or great trouble. It seems axiomatic that we should have a few days of food and water, a flashlight, a radio, blankets, candles and needed medicines, yet many do not.

Since we know that the world is not a safe place, that it never has been and probably never will be, we must all act today to be better informed, better equipped and better prepared. There are lots of vulnerabilities. We need to continue to understand those vulnerabilities, mitigate them where we can, and prepare flexible, agile, appropriate and effective response systems for those we can't mitigate.

On this fifth anniversary, do something to be better prepared.

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