



While technology alone cannot overcome the myriad challenges we are currently facing, it will most certainly play a major role.

A Changing Reality

By James A. Gondles, Jr., CAE

Executive Director

American Correctional Association

One can look at the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security or the war in Iraq as signs that America has changed. One can recall the horrific events of Sept. 11, 2001, and wonder if America can ever return to how it was before this tragic chain of events began.

Reflecting on my youth in Ponca City, Okla., I remember being told by my junior high school teachers what to do in the event of an attack on our country: move to an interior room; use the desk for protection; know where to meet my family afterward; and make sure that we had food, water and other necessary supplies. I remember seeing the black and yellow nuclear fallout shelter signs on schools and government buildings. I also remember scaring my younger sister — something she recently reminded me of — by telling her that Ponca City was 10th on the Soviet Union's list of targets because of the local oil refinery. Perhaps things have not changed as much as we would like to think. Yes, the "enemy" is different and the methods are different, but America faces many of the same concerns today as it did during my youth.

State and local law enforcement agencies are being asked to play a major role in preparing our nation for the potential of other terrorist attacks. The federal government created the Department of Homeland Security and has authorized millions of dollars in federal aid to ensure that

state, local and tribal governments have the resources and technology needed to effectively prepare for something we all hope will never come. This is an investment that is long overdue, however, I do not believe that it is enough to ensure that nothing like what happened on Sept. 11th will happen again.

As the law enforcement community struggles to meet the challenges of its new antiterrorism mission, it also will be asked to do more to ensure that the America we are holding up as a model of freedom and opportunity for the world is truly full of freedom and opportunity for its own citizens. The law enforcement community is being asked to take steps to improve the health of our country by fighting infectious, contagious and chronic diseases. We are playing an important role in improving the educational and job opportunities for those most at risk of falling into lives of crime and poverty. In addition, we must continue to ensure that we take effective steps to reduce crime across the nation, to treat substance abuse and to reduce recidivism.

This issue of *Corrections Today* highlights some of the ways that technology can help us to do our job more effectively and efficiently. While technology alone cannot overcome the myriad challenges we are currently facing, it will most certainly play a major role. The growth and development of new technologies has allowed us to do things differently and better than we did in the past.

Today, the images of prison guards walking the halls with keys hanging from their belt, and old, iron gates slamming shut are a relic of the past. Technology allows us to better use staff and makes the jobs we do safer. Technology also enables us to implement educational programs that otherwise would not be available within the confines of a correctional institution, and it allows us to track the movements of those who have committed a crime but who are not sentenced to our correctional institutions.

We will face challenges and criticism as we seek to change the way we do business and incorporate new technologies into our jobs. However, I am confident that this is the only way we will be able to successfully meet the challenges that lie ahead. I look forward to working with you to ensure that our profession leads the way in adopting those new technologies, which will improve the way we work, make our jobs safer and improve the way in which we live. We have many challenges ahead of us as we strive to continue to hold up America as the bastion of freedom for the world. ♦