



Security Planning for the 2004 Democratic National Convention (A)

When the Democratic National Committee announced, in November 2002, that it had selected Boston, Massachusetts, to host its July 2004 convention, the city's leaders and political allies jubilantly hailed their hard-fought victory. Boston had beaten out much larger cities, including New York (later chosen as the site for the Republican National Convention), Miami, and Detroit, to win the convention, which would formally nominate the Democratic challenger to President George W. Bush in the upcoming 2004 election. The city hoped to reap significant economic benefits from the many thousands expected to gather for the event, and to showcase its historical and contemporary attractions to a large national and international television audience. It was little wonder that the city's popular Democratic mayor, Thomas Menino, who had long sought to bring the convention to Boston, was likened in the press to the proverbial "grinning ... cat that had swallowed the canary" when news of the award was made public.¹

But the city's joy would soon be tempered by the somber realities of hosting the first major political event in the US since the September 11 terrorist attacks. Nominating conventions had long been a magnet for a range of domestic protesters, many of them seeking to disrupt the proceedings, but they were now also seen as a possible target for terrorist groups eager to capitalize on the opportunity to attack an important symbol of the nation's democratic process. In these more threatening times, the task of devising a comprehensive security plan that would protect conventioners was a daunting—and expensive—one, with no exact precedent to act as guide. The city could, however, draw on a major source of experience and expertise: the US Secret Service. It sought to have the Department of Homeland Security designate the convention a

¹ Scot Lehigh, "Is this the start of a new Boston attitude?" *The Boston Globe*, November 15, 2002, p. A19.

This case was written by Esther Scott for Arnold Howitt, Executive Director of the Taubman Center for State and Local Government, for use at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Funding for the case was provided by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative. (0905)

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"National Special Security Event," thereby giving that agency lead responsibility for security planning.

Thus it was that Secret Service Special Agent Scott Sheafe arrived in Boston in June 2003 to take on the role of "coordinator" of security arrangements for the Democratic National Convention (DNC), still a little over a year away. To do his job, he would need to enlist the cooperation and participation of over thirty federal, state, and local agencies, as well as the support of city and state political leaders. Under any circumstances, this would be demanding work, but the convention site—the FleetCenter, a sports and entertainment facility—posed special challenges. It was situated directly over a busy public transit station and right next to a key interstate highway; it was bordered by a bustling commercial district and close to the city's harbor and downtown. From a security point of view, the FleetCenter was, in Sheafe's words, "a very sick patient,"² and the medicine he would prescribe to make it well would be harsh. It would be Sheafe's task not only to prescribe, but to convince the patient to take the medicine.

Background: The DNC Comes to Boston

It was no secret that Mayor Menino—who would mark his tenth year in office in 2003—ardently wished to bring the Democratic National Convention to Boston. The city had bid for the 2000 convention and lost out to Los Angeles; on its second try, with the help of Senator Edward Kennedy and other members of the state's congressional delegation, its determined efforts paid off. "I think that in the end," Kennedy joked at a press conference on November 13 to announce the winning bid, "[the site selection committee] understood that no city wanted it more than Boston did."³ The convention, notes Julie Burns, a former deputy chief of staff for Menino and organizer of the city's 2004 bid for the DNC, was not in itself "a large event." Only about 35,000 were expected to attend the four-day gathering in July 2004—a trifling figure compared to the hundreds of thousands that turned out for the Patriots' Super Bowl parade or to view the Tall Ships in Boston Harbor—but roughly 15,000 of that number would be members of the press. "You've got 15,000 members of the media in your city," Burns points out, "for somewhere between six days and two to three weeks, because the planners come early; so in that sense, it's just an incredible opportunity to highlight your city."

For Mayor Menino, the media spotlight would allow the world to learn not only about Boston's rich historical past, but its dynamic present—to see it, he says, "as an older city that works." Moreover, he adds, "I saw [the convention] as a challenge for Boston. We'd never had an event of this magnitude." He was confident the city would meet the challenge, and fare better than

² Sarah D. Scalet, "Is this any place to hold a convention?" *CSO Magazine*, September 2004. Online at <http://www.csoonline.com/read/090104/convention.html>.

³ Glen Johnson, "Convention City: Democrats select Boston for '04 with nod to history," *The Boston Globe*, November 14, 2002, p. A1.

others that had hosted political conventions in the past, because he had the backing of the Chamber of Commerce and other civic and business groups. "It wasn't just the mayor saying I want the convention in Boston," he notes. Finally, the convention was expected to bring business to the city in the short-term—organizers had estimated that the event would pump \$154 million into the local economy—and attract investment in the long-term. The award of the DNC was greeted with nearly universal acclaim. "There is a delirium," said US Rep. Edward Markey at the November 13 press conference, "that is breaking out at every Dunkin' Donuts shop across the state of Massachusetts that would be hard to capture."⁴

Getting Organized. Once the long-sought prize was won, the huge job of planning for the DNC—which would take place from July 26-29, 2004—quickly got underway. Overall responsibility for organizing the event fell to "Boston 2004," the convention's host committee, headed by two former Menino aides: David Passafaro, the committee's president, and Julie Burns, its executive director. Among other things, the contract signed by the host committee required it to recruit and train a volunteer force of 8,000; provide transportation for delegates and dignitaries; and arrange for a number of auxiliary events, including hosting a party for the 15,000 media representatives and finding venues throughout the city for numerous convention-related activities. Perhaps most critically, the committee was responsible for raising the \$49.5 million that the city had budgeted for the convention in its bid.⁵ Even as the city basked in the glow of its victory, questions arose as to whether this sum would cover the costs of the convention and, in particular, an item that loomed increasingly large in importance: security.

The Security Issue. Boston had submitted its proposal for the DNC in April 2001. Its bid package, Burns notes, included a section on security, detailing the city's "ability to deal with large-scale protests, ability to deal with political events, dignitary protection. ... It was not at all focused on anti-terrorism." But by the time Boston's bid was accepted, September 11 had happened, and concerns about a terrorist attack cast a long shadow over the coming presidential race. Such concerns moved security to the front of the line of issues demanding the attention of the host committee. "Security was [only] one of the things we thought of" in preparing the bid, Burns says. "Post-9/11, it was the first thing."

The city had budgeted \$10 million for security in its winning bid. Even without the added worry of a terrorist attack, that figure had seemed low to some: Los Angeles, which had hosted the 2000 DNC, had spent over twice that amount to handle massive demonstrations around the convention center there.⁶ After September 11, there was general agreement that the need to protect

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The host committee expected the majority of funds to come from private donors, but hoped to secure \$17.5 million from public sources, either in cash or in-kind services.

⁶ Ralph Ranalli, "Critics say \$10M budget not enough to protect convention," *The Boston Globe*, November 14, 2002, p. A29; Yvonne Abraham, "DNC has price tags, details galore for '04," *The Boston Globe*, December 17, 2002, p. A1.

against terrorism would add significantly to the cost—and the complexity—of security planning for the 2004 convention. Cognizant of the new challenges facing it, the host committee moved quickly to avail itself of an important source of help from the federal government by seeking to be designated a National Special Security Event.

The NSSE. The National Special Security Event (NSSE) was created in May 1998 by presidential directive during the Clinton administration in the aftermath of earlier terrorist incidents, such as the first World Trade Center attack and the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.⁷ Under the terms of the directive, the governor of a state in which an event of “national significance” was planned could request an NSSE designation—after the passage of the Homeland Security Act in 2002, such requests were directed to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Previous NSSEs included, among others, the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, the 2000 Democratic and Republican National Conventions in Los Angeles and Philadelphia respectively, and the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. The NSSE designation provided no funding, but it did authorize the participation of federal agencies in the security planning process. Specifically, the NSSE stipulated the roles and responsibilities of three federal agencies: the Secret Service, the lead agency for preparing and implementing a security plan; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the lead for “crisis management,” which included responsibility for preparing for and resolving any crisis that might arise; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the lead in “consequence management,” which included responsibility for dealing with the aftermath of any incident that might occur.

It was this federal involvement that the Boston 2004 committee eagerly sought. The NSSE “didn’t come with money, which from the city’s perspective was unfortunate,” says Burns, but it did come “with resources,” notably in the form of planning assistance from the Secret Service. “So we were actually very proactive,” she recalls, “working with the governor”—newly elected Republican Mitt Romney—“and with [DHS] Secretary [Tom] Ridge to get our certification early, so that the Secret Service would come on board” early in the planning process. Governor Romney submitted his request to have the Democratic National Convention designated an NSSE in February 2003; three months later, on May 27, Ridge wrote to Romney informing him that his request had been approved. The Secret Service was on its way.

The Secret Service Steps In

The US Secret Service was charged with two missions: one was to investigate counterfeiting and other financial crimes, and the other, better known, was to protect the president, the vice president, their families, and other dignitaries from the US and abroad. The job

⁷ In 1993, Islamic extremists detonated a truck filled with explosives in the underground garage of the North Tower of the World Trade Center, killing six and injuring over 1,000 people. Two years later, Timothy McVeigh parked an explosives-packed truck in front of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City; the resulting explosion killed 168.

of planning the security for an event, as opposed to an individual, as the NSSE directive required it to do, was a novel one for the Secret Service, but, as Steven Ricciardi, special agent in charge of the Secret Service field office in Boston, notes, it was "a good fit" for the agency. "When you're on the president's detail [as Ricciardi had been], you're involved in planning his security, which is a large-type event every time he leaves the White House." Moreover, Ricciardi adds, "when you do presidential security, you cannot ... do it alone. You have to rely on other folks [and their] expertise [in] their jurisdictions." Special Agent Scott Sheafe agrees. "Everyday somewhere there is an advance team from the Secret Service in a city either domestic or foreign that's building a coalition of partners to prepare for a protectee visit." This was precisely the kind of collaborative effort that managing an NSSE required.

In 2003, Sheafe, a 12-year veteran of the Secret Service, was winding up his stint in Washington on the presidential detail and casting about for his next assignment. A GS-13—which Sheafe characterizes as a "journeyman" grade in the Secret Service—and eligible for promotion, he applied for and got the job of coordinator for the DNC in Boston. Once the NSSE designation was made official in late May and Sheafe had taken care of his last responsibilities on the presidential detail—doing the advance work for President Bush's attendance at the G-8 summit of industrial world leaders in Evian, France—he and his family moved to Boston, "a place I've never been to," he notes. "I know no one. But here I am."

The Boston field office—which was staffed by about 50 people and headed by Ricciardi—focused chiefly on financial fraud investigations, although, as Sheafe explains, "if there's a protectee in [the district], they put on their protection hat and get to work." While Ricciardi—who was also new to the Boston office—and his staff would work with Sheafe on the security planning, Sheafe would officially report to the Major Events Division in the agency's headquarters in Washington, DC.⁸

Although Sheafe had worked with Ricciardi earlier on then-First Lady Hillary Clinton's detail, he was otherwise a stranger to the field office and to the city. Ricciardi paired him with Don Anderson, another special agent in the Boston office, to help him learn the lay of the land, but it would be up to Sheafe to establish cooperative relationships with the state and local agencies that would be involved in providing security for the DNC. He was acutely aware of his outsider status. "Boston, I come to find out," Sheafe says, "is a tight-knit community, and [local agencies] I think were very much expecting this coordinator to come from within the [field] office." The Secret Service's decision to assign "somebody from out of town" made sense to Sheafe, "because it gives you a fresh perspective when you don't owe anybody anything. My mandate was clear, and my motives were pure—I wasn't looking to make a career out of Boston. I wasn't looking to get in good with anybody." Still, Sheafe felt that his task had to be handled with some delicacy. "My commitment to [Ricciardi]," he says, "was that I'm not going to embarrass you in your district. I'm

⁸ The Major Events Division was later merged with the agency's Dignitary Protective Division.

going to make sure when I leave here that the wonderful relationship that the Boston field office has with the law enforcement community, both local and state, and the relationship [it has] with [its] federal partners isn't going to be the same—it's going to be better."

The Planning Mechanism. While Sheafe would be starting almost from scratch in Boston, he did have the benefit of a procedure that Secret Service headquarters had established to organize planning for any NSSE, based on the agency's "core strategy" of "forming partnerships" with other law enforcement, security, and public safety agencies.⁹ The procedure called for the establishment of an intergovernmental apparatus that brought together federal, state and local agencies to work cooperatively on security planning and on resolving any issues that arose in the process. Its basic components were a steering committee—a kind of "board of directors," in Sheafe's words—composed of the heads of agencies that would have a role in the NSSE, and subcommittees—co-chaired by a member of the Secret Service and the local police department—whose task would be to devise operational and tactical plans for specific parts of the overall security plan.¹⁰ The membership of the steering committee, as well as the number and make-up of the subcommittees, depended on the type of event, but Sheafe could refer as well to previous NSSEs and his own experience on the presidential detail for ideas. "I can look and see the subcommittees they had for the DNC in 2000," he explains, "and I can see the subcommittees they had for the Olympics. And I know that if I go on an advance for the president, I need support from all these different groups, so it's basically the same model."

The group that Sheafe ultimately settled on for the steering committee encompassed the heads of eleven different agencies, including the commissioners of the Boston Police and Fire Departments, the special agent in charge of the Boston division of the FBI, the superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police, the secretary of the state Executive Office of Public Safety, the director of the regional FEMA office, and the general manager of the FleetCenter.¹¹ (See Exhibit 1 for a complete list of steering committee members.) Having agency leaders on the committee was considered a crucial ingredient to its effectiveness. "The steering committee is not going to work," Sheafe points out, "if you have the designee of the US attorney or the designee of the commissioner of police. We needed to create a body ... that had the players that were going to be involved—the decision-makers. Luckily, in this region everybody was dedicated to seeing this thing work out well. We didn't have to convince anybody that security is important, because this was a post-September 11 event."

Sheafe also put together a roster of "what the subcommittees should be and who should be on them." As was the case with the steering committee, there would be some additions and some

⁹ From the US Secret Service website. Online at <http://www.secretservice.gov/nsse/shtm1>.

¹⁰ There were actually three plans: the Secret Service's, for venue and dignitary protection; the FBI's, for crisis management; and FEMA's, for consequence management. Subcommittee plans were subsumed into whichever of the three was appropriate.

¹¹ Other senior managers of the agencies also sat in on some steering committee meetings.

rearrangements, but the final list comprised 17 subcommittees in all, each with responsibility for an area of security planning, such as venues, transportation and traffic, intelligence and counter-terrorism, and consequence management. (See Exhibit 2 for a complete list of subcommittees.) Each subcommittee would be chaired by a member of the Secret Service (some of whom came up from headquarters in Washington) and a member of the Boston Police Department; a number of subcommittees had one or more additional co-chairs, representatives of agencies that would play a major role in that particular group's work. The size of the subcommittees varied, but some were quite large: the "medical subgroup" of the consequence management subcommittee, for example, had 39 member agencies. Together, the subcommittees would work on creating highly detailed plans that would protect the FleetCenter from an attack of any kind; ensure the safety of delegates and dignitaries as they shuttled from their hotels to events at the FleetCenter and other venues; keep protesters from getting out of hand, while allowing them adequate opportunities to demonstrate; and respond to a range of possible emergencies, including chemical or biological attacks, explosions, fires, or simple human illness.

Building Partnerships. While he was assembling his lists of committee and subcommittee members, Sheafe also sought to introduce himself to key officials whose cooperation would be crucial to the success of his mission. Chief among these was Superintendent Robert Dunford, a respected veteran of the Boston Police Department. While the Secret Service would be responsible for the protection of the actual venue of the convention—the FleetCenter—as well as a handful of individual dignitaries in attendance, the Boston Police would be expected to provide security for the surrounding area and the rest of the city, including dozens of hotels and other sites where delegates and dignitaries would be gathering. Dunford had been chosen by then-Police Commissioner Paul Evans to take charge of security arrangements for the department, and had been hard at work on plans since November 2002. From Sheafe's point of view, the decision to make Dunford the police department's "point person" for the convention "made all the difference in the world." The superintendent, Sheafe notes, had been a police officer for almost 30 years. "I was 33 years old. He had been on the force almost longer than I had been alive. And he was just extremely kind, willing to explain to me the plans that he had established to date; I got the impression from him right away that he was willing to work it as a partnership."

The Steering Committee Meets. In June, Sheafe was ready for the official launch of the planning process. He sent out letters, over the signature of an assistant director from Secret Service headquarters, to the heads of the agencies he had selected, inviting them to the inaugural meeting of the steering committee on June 20, 2003, 13 months before the kickoff of the DNC. When the group convened, Sheafe recalls, "everybody [was] obviously a little bit nervous, [wondering] where the hell is this going to go and who am I and how is this going to be set up." He had given some thought to the seating arrangement, placing Dunford "right next to me," with FBI Special Agent in Charge Ken Kaiser "very, very close as well. I wanted everybody to see that it was my hope that Mr. Kaiser ... and us could build a coalition also," as he had with Dunford.

Steve Ricciardi served as the committee chairman, but he generally let Sheafe set the agenda and guide the meetings. Ricciardi could have taken charge of the meetings himself, Sheafe notes. "I don't think that's the vision that headquarters had, but he could have done it because it is his district and he knows the players and I don't. But he chose to allow me to run the meetings ... and pick issues that I felt were significant in a manner that I thought was appropriate."¹²

At that first meeting, after Ricciardi introduced him to the assembled agency leaders, Sheafe set out the ground rules for the committee and the subcommittees. The steering committee, he told them, would meet every two months at first, more often as the convention drew near; subcommittees would meet according to whatever timeframe worked best for them. Only the co-chairs of the subcommittees, Sheafe said, would report back to the steering committee. "There should be a one-voice policy for each subcommittee, and the co-chairs should be that one voice." The agency representatives delegated to sit as co-chairs, moreover, "should be given the authority to make decisions, because you can't be coming back with every issue to the steering committee, or it is not going to function." He also stressed that "the steering committee needed to be willing to dedicate the time to come to these meetings." When Sheafe finished outlining his goals, the first person to respond, as he recalls, was US Attorney Michael Sullivan. "Basically, what he said was, '... We're fully supportive and we're going to do anything we can to make this work for you.' ... And that really kind of set the [tone], and everybody else went around the table and they all said the same thing."

The Planning Process

Getting Acquainted. As they settled into their novel and complex task, some committee and subcommittee members felt the benefit of having worked together, in some cases for many years, in a relatively small community of law enforcement and public safety agencies. "All of the relationships that we built over time," reflects Richard Serino, chief of Emergency Medical Services in Boston, "and over the years for all these other events ... helped us when we were developing the plan for the DNC. ... So when it comes time for a special event [like the DNC], it's not going to be introductions for the first time; we're not exchanging business cards. ... [We're] on a first-name basis." This was especially true in the law enforcement area, where a Joint Terrorism Task Force—a consortium of about 22 federal, state and local agencies responsible for conducting counter-terrorism investigations—had brought officials into frequent contact with each other. "On the law enforcement side," says Ken Kaiser, special agent in charge of the FBI's Boston division, "we have a daily working relationship."

¹² Later, in March 2004, Ricciardi was named "principal federal official" (PFO) for the convention. The PFO—a new position created by DHS as part of its "National Response Plan"—would, Ricciardi explains, "facilitate any type of federal response that would be needed in the event of a crisis." Once he assumed his new role, he adds, he became less directly involved in the work of the steering committee.

Where that was not the case, the early going could take some adjusting. FEMA, for example, had little experience in working with some of the key participants involved in the security planning effort. It was, says Ken Horak, acting director of FEMA's regional office in Boston, "the first time we have had meaningful interaction with the Secret Service," and, as well, "the first time we were working with a number of city agencies." It took some time to come to an understanding of each other's perspectives and priorities. "We weren't knowledgeable about how the Secret Service handled these events," says FEMA's Mark Gallagher, who was a co-chair of the consequence management subcommittee.

It was, perhaps, the clarity of the Secret Service's role under the NSSE directive that kept any differences that arose from becoming disruptive. "There was no argument about who was in charge," says Carlo Boccia, director of the Mayor's Office of Homeland Security, "because that was designated—the Secret Service was in charge." Many also praised Scott Sheafe for his efforts to keep traditional rivalries and animosities to a minimum. "Quite honestly," says Boccia, who had recently retired from the Drug Enforcement Administration, "most of the difficulty always comes from the law enforcement agencies, because they are always very thin-skinned when it comes to turf. ... But the strategic ability of [Sheafe] really overcame all of those." The FBI and the Secret Service had, for example, long been rivals—not surprising, Sheafe notes, since "you have these two big kids on the block" whose jurisdictions sometimes overlapped. Even before he officially took the reins of DNC security planning in Boston, Sheafe—whose brother was an FBI agent—visited the FBI regional office to make clear that "I thought those days [of rivalry] were gone, that it didn't benefit anyone. ..." His goodwill efforts paid off. "We had no issues with the Secret Service," says Kaiser, "and that doesn't happen all over."

Sheafe himself credited Dunford with helping to lend legitimacy to the Secret Service's role in security planning and implementation for the DNC. He recalls a presentation Dunford made before the steering committee, describing the police department's plan to divide the city into eight zones for security purposes. "[Dunford] says, 'This is Zone A, the FleetCenter. Zone A is under the complete control and discretion of the United States Secret Service,'" Sheafe recounts. "I looked at [Secret Service Agent] Don Anderson and I said, 'We just won here. This is going to be a complete success because of Bob Dunford.' ... [Dunford] would constantly say, 'Tell me what you need and I'll help you find it.' He didn't try to dictate what was happening; he had a grasp of his role and my role, and how to complement each other."

Several participants noted that in a small city like Boston, the interdependence of law enforcement and public safety agencies in handling a large event like the DNC was an asset in building positive relationships within the security planning group. "We had to work together," Kaiser points out, "because if we didn't work well ... we wouldn't possibly have enough personnel to cover [the event]." Kaiser and Sheafe both contrasted the situation in Boston with that in New York City, where the massive police force of about 38,000—Boston's was only a little over 2,000—was virtually self-sufficient. "They can do just about anything they want with 38,000 police

