



Statement of Chairman Gus M. Bilirakis

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

“Taking Measure of Countermeasures (Part 1):

**A Review of Government and Industry Efforts to Protect the Homeland through
Accelerated Research, Development, and Acquisition of Chemical, Biological,
Radiological, and Nuclear Medical Countermeasures”**

April 13, 2011

I would like to welcome all of our witnesses here today and thank you for your dedication to making our nation more secure from terrorist threats.

The events of October 2001, when our nation was attacked through the mail with anthrax letters, changed the face of medical preparedness. These tragic events instilled an urgency to prepare for bioterror threats in a way that we had never done before. The 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic similarly caused us to turn inward, and review the successes of our public health response, as well as our failures. The catastrophic events in Japan – two natural disasters and a subsequent industrial disaster, an entirely unforeseen combination of events – once again force us to assess our preparedness capacity, this time for a radiological and nuclear event.

This hearing was planned well before Japan was hit with an unimaginable crisis. We are here today to discuss the ways we can and must be *proactive*, not just reactive, to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, both natural and manmade.

The responsibility begins with the Department of Homeland Security. The threats must be recognized, defined, and prioritized. The DHS threat and risk assessments are central to this effort. These tools have become instrumental in providing an awareness of the threat. They are designed not to instill fear, but rather to provide a healthy recognition of reality, and an effective means by which to prioritize limited resources. I look forward to hearing from our DHS witness today on how these assessments have grown, surpassed criticism, and are providing their customers with an indispensable tool.

One of those customers is the Department of Health and Human Services, and its Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority. BARDA is responsible for advanced development and procurement of CBRN medical countermeasures. We look forward to learning from the witnesses about BARDA successes that must be supported, as well as continued challenges to forging an effective and fruitful relationship with the private sector.

We know that BARDA has the authorities it needs to develop and acquire countermeasures. What is less clear is why it has not made use of those authorities. Of particular concern are the contracting delays. These delays seem to have increased in the past year, since the contracting and procurement functions were taken out of BARDA and placed under the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.

What is the strategic direction that BARDA is looking to take to allow development and procurement of the best countermeasures, and in the most expedient, transparent, and industry-friendly way possible?

What are the countermeasures that are missing from our stockpile – do we need vaccines for hemorrhagic fevers, or rapid diagnostics to know who has been exposed? How the material threat determinations are informing HHS investments and meeting the needs laid out by DHS is a central question.

The contributions of the Department of Defense to the health of our Nation through medical countermeasure development go back decades. DOD was a pioneer in this area. I look forward to hearing today how DOD's program has matured, and how its best practices and expertise are leveraged by DHS and HHS. DOD and HHS have a unique relationship, that of a shared stockpile. The shared anthrax stockpile, for example, allows fewer vaccines to expire and therefore better resource efficiency. Of course, we would also like to see a next-generation anthrax vaccine developed, and I am aware of considerable delays on the part of BARDA to procure that – pushing us until at least 2018 from what I understand. I look forward to hearing from DOD and HHS on how we can meet this and other pressing countermeasures needs.

So once again I thank our witnesses for being here, and for working to protect our health, protect our homeland, and foster more jobs and a healthier economy in the process.

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