



The House Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY

Peter T. King (R-NY), Chairman

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Statement of Chairman Gus M. Bilirakis

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

**“Taking Measure of Countermeasures (Part 2): A Review of Efforts to Protect
the Homeland Through Distribution and Dispensing of CBRN Medical
Countermeasures”**

May 12, 2011

This hearing is the second in a series considering medical countermeasures. Last month, the Subcommittee received testimony on Federal efforts to work with industry to research, develop, and acquire medical countermeasures. Today, the Subcommittee will focus on efforts to get those medications, diagnostics, and other medical supplies to individuals who need them in the event of a CBRN attack, pandemic, or other emergency.

Our enemies have made no secret of their desire to use weapons of mass destruction to attack the United States. Last year, the Committee on Homeland Security received testimony from former Senators Graham and Talent, the Commissioners of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism (WMD Commission). At that hearing, the Commissioners noted that “it is more likely than not that there will be... a weapon of mass destruction used

someplace on earth by a terrorist group before the end of the year 2013 and that it is more likely that the weapons will be biological rather than nuclear.”

This assessment, along with the anthrax attacks in 2001, the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, and the disaster in Japan, highlights the need for robust plans for countermeasure distribution and dispensing.

The WMD Commission issued a report card on U.S. government efforts to protect the nation from WMD terrorism last year. Sadly, the government received a grade of “F” on its efforts to enhance the nation’s capabilities for rapid response to prevent biological attacks from inflicting mass casualties. We can and must do better.

I look forward to hearing from our Federal witnesses about whether we’ve made strides in this area since that January 2010 report card. What lessons have we learned from the response to the H1N1 pandemic that can help us enhance our preparedness and response? I’d also like their opinion on whether the Federal government is investing adequate resources in the Strategic National Stockpile to ensure we have appropriate quantities of the right drugs, diagnostics, and supplies. And in light of the radiological emergency in Japan, we must not squander this opportunity to assess our own preparedness for a radiological or nuclear disaster, which I fear is substantially inadequate.

I’m interested in hearing from all of our witnesses, especially our State and local witnesses, on their view of the various distribution models, and where we need to be today to respond to an event that may happen tomorrow. Which models are the most promising to reach the largest population as expeditiously as possible? What innovative efforts are being implemented at the local level to ensure prompt dispensing?

Lastly, we must consider how effectively the Federal government is interfacing with states and localities to ensure that resources and guidance are provided, and that planning is coordinated. We must ensure that the public is appropriately informed

of the threats they face, and that the first responders who treat them have the guidance and opportunities for pre-event vaccination that they deserve.

With that, I welcome all our witnesses. I look forward to your testimony.

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