



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Peter T. King

**Opening Statement**

September 13, 2012

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**Statement of Chairman Gus Bilirakis (R-FL)  
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and  
Communications**

**Joint Subcommittee Hearing**

**"BioWatch Present and Future: Meeting Mission Needs for Effective  
Biosurveillance?"**

**September 13, 2012  
Remarks as Prepared**

Established in 2003 in the wake of the anthrax attacks that killed five people, the BioWatch program was the first nationally deployed system designed to detect an aerosol attack with anthrax and other agents of bioterrorism.

Now very near to the eleventh anniversary of the attacks that prompted the program's development, it is time to take a step back and ask what Gen-2 has accomplished for us, what it has not achieved, and how we can better understand its relevancy to an overall biodetection architecture that must be dynamic and capable of meeting evolving threats.

BioWatch is currently in its second generation, known as Gen-2, and accounts for the vast majority of the budget of the Office of Health Affairs.

The Department of Homeland Security is currently in the process of testing technology for a third generation of BioWatch, known as Gen-3. Gen-3 would be a "lab in the box," eliminating the need for daily collection of samples, and if successfully implemented, the detection time could be reduced from the current 12-36 hours down to 4-6 hours. This goal is certainly laudable. However, Chairman Lungren and I have expressed serious concerns about the status of this acquisition.

One of the many important functions of Congress is to ensure we avoid and eliminate wasteful spending. This becomes even more vital in the difficult fiscal times we are currently facing. And yet I am concerned that, without corrective action, we may be heading down a path at DHS with the Gen-3 procurement that we've been down before. And with a potential life cycle cost of \$5.8 billion, among the most costly of DHS' acquisitions, we cannot afford for it to fail.

Over the course of its existence, DHS has seen a number of failed large-scale acquisitions – be it through a failure to conduct an analysis of alternatives or cost/benefit analysis, or to adequately define requirements. We must ensure that BioWatch does not go the way of SBINet or the ASP program. However, I am concerned that DHS has not taken appropriate steps to ensure the success of Gen-3. As the GAO notes in its report, "Without a systematic effort to justify the need for the acquisition in the context of its costs, benefits, and risks, DHS has pursued goals and requirements for Gen-3 with limited assurance that they represent an optimal solution."

I am pleased our Subcommittees could convene today to consider the future of BioWatch and particularly the findings of the GAO's report as it pertains to Gen-3. Chairman Lungren and I have posed numerous questions to the Department about the Gen-3 procurement, but have not received satisfactory responses. How can we proceed with procurement of a new system when we don't fully understand the capabilities of the current system? Where is the cost/benefit analysis that proves this next generation system would be a sufficient improvement over the existing system? Where is the analysis of alternatives that says that BioWatch Gen-3 is the answer, versus improving the Gen-2 system or investing in improved informatics and data integration? And how is it possible that the Department is down to

only one single competitor, when we know without a doubt that many engineering and biotechnology companies are making biodetectors for the Department of Defense, and even for DHS itself?

I am hopeful that our witnesses will provide us with answers to these, and other, important questions about the future of this program today. It is also important to recognize that BioWatch is one component of an overall biosurveillance architecture, which must be multifaceted in order to be successful. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Garza on recent developments with O-H-A's other biosurveillance initiatives, and how they will help us achieve true situational awareness to the greatest extent possible.

We all want to ensure our Nation has a comprehensive biosurveillance capability in place. However, we must be smart about how we accomplish this goal. We must ensure that the development and procurement of the next generation of BioWatch is based on sound science, we are getting an appropriate return on our investment, and that we do not lose sight of the greater goal by harnessing all our resources toward one single and static technology.

With that, I welcome our witnesses. I look forward to your testimony and working with you to ensure we have effective programs in place.

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