



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

**Opening Statement**

September 13, 2012

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**Statement of Chairman Dan Lungren (R-CA)  
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and  
Security Technologies**

**Joint Hearing**

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

**September 13, 2012  
Remarks as Prepared**

In just a few weeks, we mark the 11th anniversary of the anthrax attacks. Since that difficult time, initiatives ranging from screening the mail, to monitoring the environment, to integrating national biosurveillance efforts have been undertaken in an effort to identify the presence of harmful infectious agents. After eleven years of refining our detection technology and fostering information sharing partnerships, have we improved our capability to identify and respond to a biological attack?

Today we will examine the Department of Homeland Security’s BioWatch program and how effective it’s been in countering the biothreat. As my colleague Chairman Bilirakis has indicated, we need to put this program in proper perspective.

We know from our oversight and from a lot of good work from the GAO that DHS, other federal agencies, and states and localities have taken many steps to improve biosurveillance. But truly integrated surveillance is still lacking. Efforts to establish a working National Biosurveillance and Integration Center, while not without flaws, have at least demonstrated where some of our capability gaps remain.

The problems are not intractable. What is necessary is a well-thought out architecture that balances the contributions of static and dynamic sensors. Many good ideas, some in the research phase, some being piloted, and some operational, are already making positive contributions. And astute physicians and advanced patient-side diagnostics may play an important role far earlier in the wake of an attack than that for which they are commonly given credit.

The DHS Science and Technology Directorate is working on a number of advanced biodetection efforts, and I expect to hear from our witnesses how these might complement our efforts to automate BioWatch.

We have heard over the years from many constituencies about the successes and challenges of the deployed BioWatch system, Generation 2. The good news is that through this program, many U.S. localities have been able to partner with the federal government and with each other to enhance their biosurveillance capabilities. BioWatch, in fact, depends on the very important contributions from state and local public health laboratories, and their service to this program is essential.

But the Gen-2 system has its deficiencies, and I look forward to hearing from Dr. Garza about the Department's plan to mitigate them.

To meet some of Gen-2's lack of capacity, OHA has proposed BioWatch Generation 3, an advanced automated detection system undergoing DHS acquisition. The GAO will tell us today that DHS did not fully develop critical information for decision making on this major acquisition, with lifecycle cost estimates now approaching \$6 billion. Furthermore, delays now put full deployment, if approved, at 2022. If biosurveillance is an urgent need, how can we justify waiting 10 more years to improve the program? I look forward to hearing from our witnesses what we can do now to make us more secure from the biothreat.

GAO has offered several recommendations for how DHS can self-correct this acquisition. DHS agreed with GAO's recommendations and plans to implement them – but is, nevertheless, pushing forward with the acquisition process to avoid further delays. My concern is not the delays but whether the multiple acquisition weaknesses identified by our Committee's oversight hearings have been addressed, and whether this very expensive acquisition will be properly handled.

We've already spent more than \$100 million on Gen-3. The House has not provided funds for FY 13. Shouldn't an acquisition of this size have a cost-benefit analysis, at the very least? We also need to understand all of the opportunities to protect human life from a bio-attack before we adopt a specific path forward. We can only do this with a thorough analysis of alternatives, which should include proposals to refine and improve the Gen-2 system before pushing forward on the next generation.

Rapid, post-event detection is unquestionably critical. But clearly we need to refine our focus on defining the problem, and then determining the total architecture – from hardware to software to the human element – that can best meet that challenge. I would like to see a truly open competition where all of the bright minds in small business and big industry come together to meet this challenge.

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