



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Susan W. Brooks (R-IN)
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications
Committee on Homeland Security**

“BioWatch: Lessons Learned and the Path Forward”

Remarks as Prepared

The BioWatch program was established in 2003 in the aftermath of the anthrax attacks that killed five people and sickened more than 20 others. The program is a system of detectors deployed to more than 30 U.S. cities to scan for a number of aerosolized bioterror agents.

Recognizing the limitations of the current system, in 2008 the Department’s Office of Health Affairs began the process to acquire a next generation detector, known as Gen-3. After a series of missteps spanning two administrations, six years and millions of dollars later, Secretary Johnson cancelled that acquisition on April 29, 2014.

We know, through this Subcommittee’s bioterror hearing in February and a subsequent classified briefing, that the threat of bioterrorism is real. In fact, in its BioWatch analysis of alternatives performed for the Department, the Institute for Defense Analysis noted that the bioterrorism threat has not changed since 2001.

With that in mind, robust biosurveillance and biodetection capabilities are vital to our security. I am interested in hearing from Dr. Brinsfield and Dr. Brothers about their efforts to work together going forward to develop, test, and deploy a next generation technology.

I am also interested in learning more about efforts to enhance the currently deployed system to make it more effective as we await new technology and about the Department’s overall biosecurity strategy.

In July 2012, the administration released its National Strategy for Biosurveillance. This strategy was supposed to be followed, 120 days later, by an implementation plan. Nearly two years later, that plan has

still not been completed. This is simply unacceptable. I hope our witnesses will be able to shed some light on the Administration's strategy and when that implementation plan will be complete.

As we consider what is next for BioWatch, we must be mindful of what went wrong with Gen-3 so we learn from those mistakes. Unfortunately, this is not the first failed acquisition in the Department's history. SBI-Net, the A-S-P program, e-Merge, and TASC all suffered from management shortcomings, be it requirements setting, or a failure to follow proper acquisition protocols, such as the completion of alternatives analyses or cost benefit analyses.

We cannot afford to waste a single dollar of security funding. I am interested in hearing from Secretary Cumiskey about the Department's efforts to mature its acquisitions system and oversight of large-scale acquisitions, such as Gen-3. It is my hope that the acquisitions legislation introduced by my colleague, Mr. Duncan of South Carolina, which the House passed just last night, will help to strengthen the Department's acquisitions management capabilities.

With that, I look forward hearing from our distinguished panel of witnesses and to continuing the Subcommittee's examination of the bioterrorism threat and our programs and capabilities to address it.

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