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OPENING STATEMENT

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications
Committee on Homeland Security

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 at 2:00 PM
311 Cannon House Office Building

Today's hearing on the research, development, and acquisition of Medical Countermeasures is timely, given the ongoing response to the tragedy in Japan.

The earthquake and subsequent tsunami initiated a public health emergency caused by the leaking of radiation from nuclear reactors.

Even now, the situation has become far worse than anyone could have ever predicted. The devastation that has occurred since the initial earthquake makes the need for this hearing more important than ever.

Our nation continues to support Japan as it seeks to mitigate the effects of the radiation leak and recover from this historic disaster.

I sincerely hope our government's agencies responsible for threat analysis and response to public health emergencies have identified the initial lessons learned from this unfortunate event.

We must enhance our coordination and response capabilities to protect citizens from the real threat of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents.

Our governmental efforts should not occur in the silos that have led to failures in the past.

During this difficult economic recovery, we must take steps to ensure we maximize all of our resources by leveraging the capabilities of all stakeholders.

It is imperative to our nation's security for government and industry medical countermeasure efforts to operate in unison.

The Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act of 2006 (known as PAHPA) created the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) within HHS with the specific purpose of promoting coordination amongst the various agencies responsible for medical countermeasures.

The Act charged this Office with coordinating HHS's cross-departmental and interagency countermeasure research, advance development, and procurement efforts.

This is a critical and difficult task given the autonomy of the stakeholders which comprise the Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasure Enterprise.

On a daily basis within HHS, the National Institute of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Food and Drug Administration report directly to the Secretary of HHS.

I am interested in knowing how ASPR ensures that it coordinates our countermeasure research, development, and acquisition process given the organizational jockeying that usually occurs with cross-agency projects.

As Congress considers plans to reauthorize PAHPA, I would like to hear whether ASPR has all the authorities needed to move these efforts forward.

ASPR's management of the Enterprise, the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), and Project Bioshield has to be effective to ensure we yield the results originally envisioned by these initiatives.

ASPR should develop a clear strategy in order to ensure we are getting results from the billions of taxpayers' dollars that fund our medical countermeasure endeavors.

As part of this strategy, we must also leverage the experience and capabilities of the Department of Defense.

It makes no sense for our government to conduct separate military and civilian research, development, and acquisition projects for the same countermeasures.

Finally, we must do all we can to protect our nation's most precious and vulnerable resources.

The care for our nation's children should be a primary concern in our emergency preparedness efforts; one that is echoed by the findings of the National Commission on Children and Disasters and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Unfortunately, it does not appear that our efforts to develop medical countermeasures for children have been properly prioritized.

I am interested in knowing what gaps exist regarding countermeasures for children and how we can expeditiously close them to protect this vulnerable population.

As the representative of the 37th district of California, I understand the critical importance of developing effective nuclear, biological, radiological and chemical countermeasures.

There are four nuclear reactors located in my state, with two of them located within 50 miles from my district.

If an emergency were ever to occur at one of these nuclear reactors, the issues that we raise today would have a direct impact on the outcome of such a situation.

Thus, it is very important to me that we examine these critical issues and work towards building a more secure nation.