

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****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 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee hearing entitled “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”:

“Since the enactment of Project BioShield, Congress has worked to enhance the coordination between Federal government and private industry to develop a preparedness and acquisition strategy for medical countermeasures.

During the 111th Congress, this Committee heard testimony from Senators Bob Graham and Jim Talent, then the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism.

They found that over the past decade the Federal government has failed to improve its ability to prevent biological attacks from inflicting mass casualties.

In fact, the WMD Commission gave the Federal government the grade of a “F” in enhancing the nation’s capability to:

- have adequate supplies of appropriate medical countermeasures;
- quickly distribute those countermeasures;
- treat and isolate the sick in medical facilities; and
- protect the nation’s well-being through vaccines and prophylactic medications.

As I stated during that same hearing, it is imperative that we focus on the seriousness of the bioterrorism threat and confront it with purpose and speed, especially in the development and procurement of medical countermeasures.

I believe that our capability to prepare and respond to bioterrorism depends upon the strength of all links in the countermeasures development chain, including the role of the Department of Homeland Security.

While the role of the Department is limited primarily to threat determination, it still holds the responsibility of overall emergency preparedness and management, which could be leveraged to strengthen medical countermeasure development efforts.

The Department should first ensure that the threat determination process within the Science & Technology Directorate is effective and supportive of the overall process.

Second, the Department must ensure that the threat determination process, which is housed in S&T, does not interfere with the efforts of other components.

Finally, the Department, as the lead agency on coordination of emergency preparedness, should work with the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate and implement the Federal government's strategy to develop, acquire and distribute medical countermeasures to our population.

We as a nation face a real threat of a large-scale bio-terror event.

It is our responsibility as a Congress to examine the potential for significant casualties and economic impacts from this type of event.

Also, to recognize the risks involved and make rigorous oversight a priority to ensure the risk of bioterrorism is mitigated by the Nation with effective preparedness and resiliency. “

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