

Ranking Member Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY)
Opening Statement, as prepared

Joint Hearing of the
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection and Security Technologies
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications
House Committee on Homeland Security

“WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act of 2011”

Thursday, June 23, 2011

It's important for the safety of our country to come together today in this joint hearing to discuss the legislation of our Colleague and former Committee Member, Congressman Pascrell. His hard work on a very complex issue has resulted in legislation that many of us can support. Thank you for calling this hearing.

The WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act of 2011 is an example of what we can achieve when we pull together, instead of constantly pulling apart. It's an example of what can be accomplished when we draw circles of interest instead of boxes of exclusion.

Those of us who represent the high-density populations of the Northeast are acutely aware of our shared vulnerability, how a single weapon of mass destruction can devastate huge populations, and render infrastructure, that serves millions of our citizens, unusable.

I'm proud that this Committee, who passed this bill in the 110th Congress, with Members from all walks of life and political persuasions, can take the findings of experts and colleagues, as we have received from the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, and use that kind of fact finding and recommendations to pass legislation with truly bi-partisan support.

Senator Bob Graham of Florida and Senator Talent, who is with us today, chaired the Commission and gave selflessly to this effort, devoting time and most importantly their intellects, toward a comprehensive look at gigantic challenges posed by the thought of indiscriminate use of a weapon of mass destruction on innocent civilians. I think the work they accomplished is something we are all proud of.

But I'm not here to paint a rosy picture, the scenarios before us are sometimes hard to grasp, especially extraordinarily complex ones involving Chemical, Biological, Radiation, and Nuclear threats, and their affects on our citizens are unimaginable. But it is the difficult job of these Subcommittees to imagine these events, and figure out a way to protect our citizens.

Of particular interest to those of us from the Northeast are programs built around the Securing our Cities Initiative, the unified effort among Federal, state and local law enforcement in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut to defend against the threat of a radiological or nuclear device. DHS, the New York Police Department, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and officials from three states and 91 localities are involved in this partnership.

The more law enforcement officials who have the ability to detect and are on the lookout for nuclear and radiological material, and are in touch with health officials monitoring biological and disease incidents in and around New York City, the better chance law enforcement has to prevent a successful attack.

I expect we are going to hear some on-the-ground testimony today from the Sheriff from Passaic County, because he is charged with carrying out the day-to-day preparation and response plans for the kind of horrific events we contemplate in these scenarios.

We must find ways to fund our front line of defense against the kind of horrendous events we plan for, and not how we can glibly and arbitrarily reduce the resources we need to protect our families.