

Statement of Ranking Member Donald M. Payne, Jr. (D-NJ)

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications

How Effective is the Science and Technology Directorate?: Stakeholder Perspectives

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

I look forward to working with S&T and its stakeholders to ensure that components of the Department and their State and local partners have the technology they need to do their jobs better and safer.

I would like to begin, however, by addressing a few matters not directly related to today's hearing.

First, I would like to send my sympathies to those affected by the horrific terrorist attack in New York City on Halloween and express my gratitude to the brave firefighters, EMS, and law enforcement personnel who responded.

I would also like to join the people of Sutherland Springs, Texas in mourning the 26 people murdered for being at the place at the wrong time – in this case, at church on Sunday.

To those grieving loved ones, we pray for your strength in the difficult days that are to come.

And to those fed up with Members of Congress sending their thoughts and prayers to the victims of the mass shootings every time it happens and then refusing to do anything to stop it, I stand with you. Instead of letting senseless actions take place, it is long overdue that we do what makes the most sense and take significant action to stop this from ever happening again.

Finally, I would like to express my disappointment that last week's Full Committee hearing with the FEMA Administrator and the Mayor of San Juan was postponed, and join Full Committee Ranking Member Thompson in asking that it be rescheduled as soon as possible.

As I said at our last hearing, our national response doctrine is not working for the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and we need to figure out what we can do to expedite the response and recovery efforts there.

I have heard, first hand, from citizens attempting to get goods to struggling family members back in Puerto Rico and find unsurmountable financial obstacles at every single turn. We must do better and not tomorrow, right now.

Returning to the subject of today's hearing, one thing these recent tragedies have taught us is that the threats we face – from natural disasters to manmade attacks – are continuing to evolve.

From extreme weather events becoming more frequent and more severe, to terrorists weaponizing cars and trucks, to bad actors wreaking havoc on soft targets, the kind of threats facing our country demands a Science and Technology Directorate that is sufficiently innovative and dynamic to be responsive to the demands of an ever-changing threat landscape.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here today, particularly Dr. Reggie Brothers, the former Under Secretary for Science and Technology.

During the three years he spent leading S&T, Dr. Brothers focused on cultivating relationships with the Homeland Security Industrial Base to better leverage off-the-shelf technologies, coordinating research and development priorities across the Department, and launching programs to attract businesses to work with S&T by streamlining bureaucratic processes.

Dr. Brothers navigated tight budgets and organizational challenges within DHS to create incentives for private-sector engagement and did so while working to overcome long-held industry concerns that S&T did not have the budget or clout within the Department to guarantee a market for homeland security solutions.

Although S&T matured under Dr. Brothers' leadership, it continues to face budget challenges, struggles to gain the confidence of private sector partners, and is involved in a large DHS reorganization of certain Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear counterterrorism activities.

Now that Dr. Brothers is a free agent, no longer bound by OMB, I will be interested in his candid observations on these issues and how the Committee can help bolster S&T's credibility as the research and development hub that drives acquisition decisions in the Department.