
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
Subcommittee on Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness

Meeting the Bioterrorism Challenge

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Kennedy, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee. Bioterrorism is one of the most dangerous threats facing this nation, and you are to be commended for devoting attention to this problem. I will give you my assessment of the bioterrorist threat and my recommendations on the measure that should urgently be taken to prepare our nation to meet this threat.

I base my views on my experience as Director of Central Intelligence and Deputy Secretary of Defense in the first Clinton administration, as a member of President George H.W. Bush's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, as chairman of the Commission on the Organization of the Government to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction, and from the mid-seventies, my service on many Defense Science Board and other government advisory committees, that addressed various aspects of the weapons of mass destruction threat.

My views align closely with most who have studied the threat of bioterrorist and our biodefense preparedness. At the World Economic Conference this January I served on a panel with Majority Leader Frist, a member of this subcommittee, that addressed bioterrorism and I believe our views on this important subject are quite similar.

My assessment of the threat is as follows:

- Terrorist groups with international reach, such as al Qaeda, have shown interest in biological weapons. The technology for producing biological agents and dispersal

mechanisms is well known and easily within the capacity of terrorist organizations. Thus the threat is real.

- We are fortunate that the United States, our allies, and our deployed military forces have not yet been subject to a large-scale biological attack. The likelihood of an attack, our vulnerability to an attack, and the need to prevent catastrophic consequences, means that biodefense deserves to be a national priority.
- Despite the many warning, and some progress by the various involved government agencies, including Health and Human Services (HHS) and its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Institutes of Health, (NIH), and the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS), our territory, citizens, agriculture and livestock remain unacceptably vulnerable to a catastrophic biological agent attack. State and local government cannot possibly deal with these events without significant technical and financial help from the federal government.
- In the near term, the agents of greatest concern are anthrax and smallpox. In the longer term, it is entirely possible that new classes of pathogens will be developed based on modern molecular biology and biotechnology techniques that will be more virulent and more difficult to detect and to treat.
- To my knowledge, no comprehensive multi-year program plan exists that integrates the efforts of the various agencies required to improve our nation's biodefense posture.

Here are some recommended actions I believe need to be taken or pursued more aggressively in combating the bioterrorist threat.

- Improved intelligence on bioterrorism is a vital part of protecting our country, because it offers the prospect of disrupting a development effort, intercepting equipment or materials intended for a hostile recipient, or interdicting an attack before it occurs. Bioterrorism is a demanding intelligence task, because so much of the technology and activity is “dual-use” in character, possessing both legitimate and illegitimate purposes. Director of National Intelligence Negroponte should be

encouraged to undertake periodic thorough all-source review of our capacity for collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence on the biological interests and activities of terrorist groups and nations of concern.

- I believe that this nation should reinstitute the practice of smallpox vaccination for the entire population. I recognize that smallpox inoculation carries a small, but definite risk, so the issue of indemnification for drug manufacturers and health professionals and the issue of fair compensation for those injured, need to be addressed. But smallpox vaccination is the single step that would best protect the American people from the catastrophic consequences of the most likely infectious agent that a terrorist might use.
- The nation needs a plan that aligns resources against prioritized needs to address all aspects of biodefense. The plan should include: (1) efforts to improve the capacity of first responders to cope with an attack. This means providing adequate equipment, facilities, medicines, and training; (2) emergency policies and procedures for controlling epidemics and establishing quarantines in the case of an attack; and (3) an aggressive R&D effort to improve biological agent detection and treatment. In the absence of an integrated plan, the President, Congress, and the American people are not able to measure the progress we are making at improving our biodefense preparedness.
- The nation urgently needs a robust research and development program to develop vaccines and drugs to combat both known biotoxins and to provide protection against virulent new genetically engineered organisms. The 2004 Bioshield act is an important step in this direction.

These last two recommendations hint at an important linkage that deserves special mention. As the nation strengthens the capacity of the public health system to deal with the extreme situation of a major biological attack and to develop means of combating the most virulent and infectious agents imaginable, it is possible that that these capabilities will also improve the day to day capacity of the public health system to serve our citizens. I do not suggest

biodefense funding should be used to support unrelated, but perhaps worthy, public health improvements. Such enhancements should compete on their own merits. But, I do suggest that intelligent design and execution of a biodefense capability can and should improve the capacity of the country's health care system to operate under normal circumstances. This committee is in an ideal position to encourage this dual benefit.

Superficial accounts of the horrendous consequences of a biological attack too often lead to the opinion that it is impossible to protect this country and its citizens against a biological attack. I do not believe that this to be true. While perfect protection cannot be guaranteed, a measured government biodefense program can both reduce the possibility of such an attack and vastly reduce the casualties and suffering that would accompany it.

Thank you for your attention and I will be pleased to address any question the committee members may have.