



# COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

David Price (D-NC), Chairman, Subcommittee on Homeland Security

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## OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DAVID PRICE *Office of Health Affairs Hearing, 10 am*

Good Morning. Today we have with us Dr. Jeff Runge, the Department of Homeland Security's Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs and Chief Medical Officer. We welcome you again before the Subcommittee. We appreciate your service to the country and appreciate the very challenging and important role you play. This is the first hearing where we have only one witness, which I hope will give us the time to engage in intensive discussions of your work.

Today we will cover the Office of Health Affairs' fiscal year 2009 budget request, including: the BioWatch program; OHA's coordination with other Federal agencies on Project Bioshield; and the Office's overall role within the Department.

The FY 2009 budget request for the Office of Health Affairs is \$161 million, an increase of \$44.8 million, or 38%, above the fiscal year 2008 level. The majority of this increase is for BioWatch, which would receive \$111.6 million, or \$34.5 million above the fiscal year 2008 level of \$77 million. While part of that increase would be used to expand the field testing of Generation 3 technology, the bulk of the increase – \$20 million – would be used to procure and deploy 150 Automated Pathogen Detection Systems. These systems are also known as "BioWatch Generation 2.5".

Dr. Runge I would like to hear more from you about the rationale for investing tens of millions of dollars in these "Generation 2.5" systems when OHA is in the process of field testing Generation 3 technologies and before the National Academies of Science assessment of BioWatch that Congress directed is complete. Enhancing our ability to detect biological attacks is a high priority, and for that very reason it is important not only to do it quickly, but to do it right.

During last year's Bioterrorism hearing, I expressed concern that the Federal government's Bioterrorism strategy is spread across a multitude of agencies. In August 2007, the Government Accountability Office expressed a similar concern regarding the clarity of federal roles and responsibilities for Pandemic Flu preparedness. So I am pleased to see that the request for Planning and Coordination is \$9.9 million, an increase of \$5.4 million from the fiscal year 2008 level of \$4.4 million.

I don't have a good sense, however, about the extent to which your Office has improved the coordination of the Federal government's Bioterrorism strategy over the last year, or how you plan to further improve it in the coming years. Do you have specific goals and timelines against which to measure your progress in this area? I look forward to hearing your frank assessment about what it will take to overcome the many jurisdictional roadblocks you face.

One of the more important coordinating roles you play is that associated with Project Bioshield. Dr. Runge, I understand you have no direct authority over this Health and Human Services program. But it was funded through the Department of Homeland Security, and you are the lead for the

Department's biodefense interactions with other Departments and agencies. So we look to you for opinions and solutions on how DHS and other agencies can ensure that the nation's medical system is capable of managing national biological emergencies.

Since last year, unfortunately, there has been only minor progress in this program. Smallpox and Anthrax countermeasures have been purchased, but the program has not lived up to the President's assertions that it would ensure that "our drug stockpile remains safe, effective and advanced." Of the \$3.4 billion available under the program, only \$1.9 billion has been obligated. An additional \$2.175 billion is set to become available in fiscal year 2009. Dr. Runge, I would like your frank assessment of whether the threat assumptions that led us to appropriate these funds still hold. And if they do, I would like your assessment of why Project Bioshield has failed to live up to expectations. Is there some flaw in its structure that could be fixed? What can this Committee do to ensure that this \$2.2 billion in FY 2009 funding does not sit unused but is applied to its intended purposes?

In a moment, I will ask you to summarize your written statement, and ask that you limit yourself to five minutes. Your full written statement will be entered into the record

But first let me yield to Mr. Rogers for any statement that he would like to make.

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