

Ranking Member Laura Richardson (D-CA)
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

Today’s hearing and the release of the WMD Act is timely, given the host of threats we continue to face. As the WMD Commission found in its December 2008 report, America needs to move more aggressively to address our vulnerability to a bioterror attack.

As an original co-sponsor of the WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act, I am proud to take up this bipartisan legislation that addresses vital WMD issues from prevention to recovery.

The recent disaster in Japan provides us with a greater understanding of the unique public health issues we must address as a nation.

This bill addresses these unique issues and promotes improving our countermeasure development and dispensing mechanisms. One of the key provisions in this bill includes ensuring we empower citizens by providing WMD preparedness guidance and early warning systems. Our diverse communities require we consider the needs of all individuals and have inclusive policies.

An area of particular importance to me is ensuring that we consider the needs of vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

This bill addresses these areas by recognizing the important role of state and local first responders in the planning process. The first responder community is an essential partner in our WMD preparedness efforts. They are on the frontline in our efforts to deter an attack; and they will be there first to help affected citizens.

Therefore, Congress should provide our first responders with the resources they need in order for them to meet the wide-ranging needs associated with responding to a WMD terror attack.

We must act now, prior to an attack to ensure that the personnel, plans, equipment, and other resources are in place to effectively respond. The WMD Act ensures first responders are supported through training, exercise participation, intelligence information, grant funding, and inclusion in the preparedness planning process.

I am proud that this Committee is working together to move this bill forward and address these concerns.

As the representative of the 37th district of California, I understand the critical importance of preparedness for a potential terror attack utilizing chemical, nuclear, biological, or radiological weapons.

There are four nuclear reactors located in my state, with two of them located within 50 miles from my district. If these nuclear facilities ever became compromised, the issues that we raise today would have a direct impact on the outcome of such a situation.

It is time for us to act and close the gaps that exist and provide the resources needed to ensure we are resilient and able to secure the homeland.