

# **RANKING MEMBER LAURA RICHARDSON OPENING STATEMENT**

## *Taking Measure of Countermeasures (Part 3): Protecting the Protectors*

### **Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications**

**April 17, 2012 at 2:00 PM**

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today, especially our first responders – both those we traditionally think of as first responders and those who become first responders when called to duty.

We do not usually think of Letter Carriers as First Responders. But, since 2004, the United States Postal Service has worked with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a system to augment Point of Distribution (“POD”) Network to facilitate the rapid distribution of countermeasures after a biological attack.

In 2005, the Center for Disease Control recognized that if a major biological event were to overwhelm local response – “invoking the USPS plan could be the only way to save thousands of lives.”

The critical role the United States Postal Service can play in distributing medical countermeasures was recognized by President Obama in Executive Order 13527, which directed the Federal government to develop “a national U.S. Postal Service medical countermeasures dispensing model to respond to a large-scale biological attack.”

Today, the resulting National Postal Model is operational in Minneapolis/St. Paul and has been launched in Louisville, Kentucky. The program continues to grow as more cities are selected to participate.

The program’s success can be attributed to the patriotism of postal employees, and the careful planning among HHS, DHS, the Postal Service, and other Federal, State, and local partners, who have worked together to ensure that the postal employees who participate in the program – and their families – have access to pre-positioned medical countermeasures.

During these difficult fiscal times, I am pleased that the existing resources of the United States Postal Service can be leveraged to ensure an effective response to a biological attack.

That said, I am concerned about the ability of the United States Postal Service to continue its important homeland security function if current efforts to consolidate post offices and lay-off postal workers are successful.

I hope the testimony at the hearing today will draw attention to the important role that United States Postal Service employees will be expected to play in the event of a CBRN attack. I should also to note that the National Postal Model would not be successful without the efforts of local first responders. Under the National Postal Model, law enforcement officials will escort postal workers on their routes as they distribute medical countermeasures.

We have a responsibility to protect all of our first responders. Like others on this Committee, I am concerned about the delay in issuing the guidance. But I am also troubled that this Committee failed to mark-up H.R. 2356, the “WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act of 2011,” which would have improved availability of medical countermeasures for first responders.