

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****BioWatch: Lessons Learned and the Path Forward***

June 10, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee hearing entitled “BioWatch: Lessons Learned and the Path Forward”:

“Nearly two years ago, this Subcommittee held a hearing on acquisition failures that occurred as the Department of Homeland Security pursued BioWatch Gen-3. In addition to the problems with acquisition practices, Gen-3 was wrought with cost-overruns and technical challenges at the time.

Accordingly, at that hearing, Members of this panel urged DHS to suspend acquisition activities until it completed and assessed foundational acquisition documents per the recommendations of the Government Accountability Office.

I am pleased that the Department heeded the advice of the GAO and our Members. The Department’s action resulted in the completion of a thorough Analysis of Alternatives, and the time necessary to process the findings and determine the best path forward. Given the challenges the Department has experienced with acquisitions in the past, I have consistently urged it to suspend acquisition immediately when problems exist so it can re-evaluate.

I commend the Department for doing that here. Although nearly \$100 million has already been appropriated to Gen-3, the Department’s decision to slow down and act deliberately will save taxpayer dollars in the long-run.

That said, I echo concerns made by other members of this panel about the timing of the Analysis of Alternatives. I was also troubled to learn that there may have been alternative biodetection technologies used by other Federal agencies at the time acquisition for Gen-3 began, but it does not appear that DHS considered adapting those technologies instead of spending millions to develop its own.

I will be interested in learning whether DHS will consider biodetection technology currently used by other Federal agencies or other off-the-shelf technologies.

I am also interested in learning more about the status of currently-deployed BioWatch technology, and any challenges it faces. For example, I understand that much of the air sample and laboratory equipment may be reaching the end of their life-cycle, and that some of the diagnostic technology is outdated.

How will DHS address those issues, and does it have the resources to carry out the system upgrades necessary to keep existing BioWatch technology working?

Finally, I understand that the Department is contemplating changes to the Bioterrorism Risk Assessment (BTRA). I am interested in understanding more about the changes to the BTRA, and how the Department will make sure that whatever bio-detection technology is deployed addresses the threat posed.”

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