

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Strategic Perspectives on the Bioterrorism Threat***

April 22, 2015 (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 “Strategic Perspectives on the Bioterrorism Threat”:

“Last month, this Subcommittee examined efforts to bolster the ability of Federal, State, and local governments to respond to chemical terrorism. I am pleased that the Subcommittee is now taking the opportunity to assess bio-terrorism threats and our ability to prevent and respond to such attacks.

One of the key recommendations that the 9/11 Commission made to Congress was to address the grave threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Accordingly, when I was Chairman of this Committee, we authorized the Commission for the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, or the WMD Commission, on which Senator Talent – who is here with us today – served as Vice Chair.

In 2008, the WMD Commission issued a report making a series of recommendations to address WMD threats, particularly bioterrorism. Unfortunately, the Federal government has been slow to respond.

In 2010, a WMD Commission progress report gave the U.S. government an “F” for failing to do enough to prevent a biological attack on the United States or to be able to respond effectively in the event of a biological attack.

In 2011, the WMD Center found that the United States was still unprepared to detect and respond to a large-scale biological attack, despite upwards of \$60 billion invested in developing those capabilities. The Federal government’s failure to implement appropriate policies and build the robust governance infrastructure necessary to tackle biological threats came to a head last fall when an Ebola victim sought treatment in a Texas hospital.

In addition to public concern, evolving guidance regarding appropriate PPE for hospital staff, and inconsistent quarantine policies at the State and local level, it was unclear who in the Federal government was in charge of developing, and coordinating the implementation of, policies to contain the virus and ensure that the sick could be treated safely.

The response structure was seemingly lacking. Nevertheless, although the Federal response to a low number of Ebola cases in the United States was somewhat stilted, it was successful. I worry, however, that we would not be so lucky in the event of a biological attack. It has been nearly seven years since the WMD Commission released its report and recommendations, and three years since the WMD Center released its damning report card of our National Bio-Response Capabilities.

During that time, Congressman Pascrell and Former Chairman King have introduced the WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act, which would implement many of the WMD Commission’s recommendations, three times. Unfortunately, the bill has never been enacted. In the absence of a comprehensive legislative remedy to our bioterrorism capability gaps, I will be interested in learning whether our witnesses believe we have made any progress in improving our response to bio-threats over the past several years. I am also interested to know how State and local governments address bioterrorism threats.”

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