

Opening Statement -Ranking Member Cedric L. Richmond

Joint hearing: “Weapons of Mass Destruction: Bolstering DHS to Combat Persistent Threats to America”

Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

July 14, 2015

I want to thank our witnesses today, the Department officials on our first panel, and the practitioners on the second panel who have specialized knowledge of how our nuclear and biological detection programs work.

Today’s hearing will focus on the Administration’s plans to merge the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, or DNDO, with the Office of Health Affairs, or OHA, to form a ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ office in Headquarters.

This merged office, as proposed, would focus on the challenges we face from an array of chemical, biological, nuclear, and explosives threats, commonly referred to as CBRNE.

I applaud Secretary Johnson’s pledge to elevate CBRNE focus and visibility within DHS. These are serious threats, and our efforts to combat them must be equally serious.

The history of this proposal shows how important careful consideration is. Even though the original proposal for the creation of DHS in 2002 included a specific office and Under Secretary for Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Countermeasures,¹ Congress chose to direct many of those functions to the Under Secretary for Science and Technology (S&T),².

And, over the past few years, the Committees on Appropriations have instructed the Department to take a “holistic approach toward realignment,” suggesting that simply merging offices may not fully address CBRNE deficiencies, or might create new inefficiencies.

As we examine the proposal today, I hope we will focus on the heart of the issue: how can we best protect the American people from chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive threats.

We should not simply approve changes to an organizational flow chart and call it a day. We must make sure that those changes are made with proper planning and fully thought-out so that we strengthen and improve the Department. As GAO puts it, “...the end result of a government reorganization should not simply be a collection of component units, but the transformation to an integrated, high-performance organization.”³

As we are going to hear today in testimony, the scale of the reorganization may itself pose a challenge. The results of both policy and operational choices made during this reorganization may affect its eventual short- and long-term success.

The key factors for the Department, and for our Subcommittees to consider include: identifying the optimal structure for an office focusing on weapons of mass destruction and the mission, scope, and appropriate leadership of that new office.

¹ Title III of H.R. 5005, as introduced, in the 107th Congress.

² P.L. 107-296, Title III.

³ Government Accountability Office, Government Efficiency and Effectiveness: Opportunities for Improvement and Considerations for Restructuring, GAO-12-454T, March 21, 2012.

Additionally, we should keep in mind the message this Committee delivered in 2010, under then-Chairman Thompson, when it offered a combined S&T and DNDO authorization in the belief that there can be conflicts of interest between research & development and procurement, so those are best left to separate organizations. While not all goals of that legislation were achieved, the message was clearly delivered.

What I hope we are going to hear today is, “How can the Department’s overall mission be better defined”?

Let me finish with this thought. On the ground, and every day, our nuclear deterrence and biodefense effort as a nation depends on motivated and vigilant officers across the globe, supplied with the best equipment and intelligence we can give them.

Officers working at our nation’s ports of entry have an especially complex and difficult job. Thousands of decisions are made every day all across our borders, ports, and airports, to clear a container or a vehicle for transit into the United States. These are vital components in the flow of commerce in the world’s premier and largest trading market, the United States.

Other cargo requires further inspection, or even denial of entry or and interdiction action taken on a vehicle or person. That is the hard, cold, repetitive, and everyday reality of our mission to prevent a violent nuclear or chemical attack, or biological event or outbreak.

We are grateful for all of our dedicated men and women in the field who protect us from weapons of mass destruction.