

Statement of

# The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator  
Vermont  
May 11, 2004

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Hearing Before the Subcommittee on  
Terrorism, Technology & Homeland Security  
"Rapid Bio-Terrorism Detection and Response"  
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Today's hearing focuses on the continued threat of bio-terrorism and the need for rapid detection and response. I remember holding what may have been the Senate's first hearings on these types of issues back in 1988, as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Technology and the Law. I said then that we cannot be complacent and assume that bio-terrorism and other sorts of techno-terrorism are never going to happen here. Now more than ever, we should assume just the opposite, and prepare ourselves accordingly.

This subcommittee last addressed this issue in November 2001, after a frightening experience here in our own Senate office buildings. Anthrax-laced letters were mailed to Senator Daschle and me, and to various news media personnel, leading to the first cases of infection, illness and death of Americans from the deployment of a biological weapon. Twenty-two Americans ranging in age from seven months to 94 years were stricken; five of our fellow Americans died. These were innocent victims, some just at work on the wrong day at the wrong time - reminiscent of so many others who fell victim to the September 11 attacks.

We in the Senate are still adjusting to the aftermath of the attacks. Just this past February, a ricin scare announced by Senator Frist shut down some congressional offices for as much as four business days. We then learned that there had been other ricin attacks at the White House and elsewhere. Though we continue to learn and to implement increased security measures in our workplaces, we sometimes feel as vulnerable as ever.

As we continue our struggle to be safe and free from threats of terrorism, it is important that we not allow these victims to become forgotten casualties of terror. This past October, I introduced the Anthrax Victims Fund Fairness Act of 2003, with my good friends Senators Daschle, Lautenberg, Nelson of Florida, Feingold, Corzine, Mikulski, and Sarbanes. The bill would allow the victims of the anthrax attacks in 2001 to seek help through the September 11th Victims Compensation Fund to pay for medical expenses and to provide for themselves and their families if they have been unable to return to work. The perpetrator or perpetrators of these acts of terrorism remain at large, as the FBI continues its investigation. Though justice will have to wait for these victims, they should not have to wait for Congress to act.

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