

Statement of
The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin

United States Senator
Maryland
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OPENING STATEMENT OF

SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

CHAIRMAN, TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

HEARING: "STRENGTHENING SECURITY AND OVERSIGHT

AT BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH LABORATORIES"

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2009

The subcommittee will come to order.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Americans suffered another type of terrorist attack in October 2001: biological attack. Letters were mailed to members of Congress using the US Postal Service, ultimately resulting in the deaths and sickening dozens of individuals. The federal government responded by increased funding for biodefense. Congress also implemented the 9/11 Commission recommendations, which called for the creation of a Department of Homeland Security, and urged the government to take stronger measures to deny WMD to terrorists.

High-containment laboratories play a critical role in the biodefense effort, and involve a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors, military and civilian communities, as well as our international partners. At the same time, increasing the number of personnel and laboratories with access to these deadly agents may increase the chances of accidental or deliberate misuse of hazardous materials, posing a significant public health threat.

Today's hearing will examine the current security measures at our laboratories, including both physical security and personnel reliability, and look at best practices in both the government and private sector, including our nation's preeminent research laboratories. We will also examine the various government agencies that have oversight responsibility for these programs, as well as recommendations from organizations as to how to strengthen and improve our security at these laboratories while not unduly chilling innovation, research, and collaboration with our international allies.

The FBI recently concluded that the October 2001 anthrax attacks were carried out by a government scientist working at a biological research laboratory at Ft. Detrick, in my own state of Maryland. I have visited this military base on numerous occasions. The laboratory is the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, commonly known as USAMRIID.

Just last month, the Army broke ground on a new \$680 million headquarters building for USAMRIID, which will house the most cutting-edge research on dangerous biological organizations in the highest possible biosafety space, known as Bio-Safety Level 4, or BSL 4. This precaution is being used in order to protect the workers at Ft. Detrick and the surrounding community of Frederick, Maryland.

The laboratory will conduct research on the most deadly pathogens known to humankind, including anthrax, the plague, and the Ebola virus. I know that our Ft. Detrick employees have also been working to help the government to combat swine flu and the West Nile virus, among others.

Panel I of the hearing will examine the executive branch's current efforts to strengthen and improve biosecurity and biosafety at laboratories, including personnel reliability, physical and perimeter security, and inventory control. I look forward to hearing testimony from the Departments of Justice, Defense, and Homeland Security.

Panel II of the hearing will receive testimony from outside experts, including the recent report of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction, chaired by the distinguished former Senator from Florida, Bob Graham, who also served as the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. We will also receive testimony from the Government Accountability Office and the Center for Health and Homeland Security at the University of Maryland at Baltimore.

I will now recognize Senator Kyl, the Ranking Member of our Subcommittee, for any remarks that he would care to make at this time.