

Opening Statement of Senator Michael B. Enzi
Subcommittee on Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness

21st Century Biological Threats
May 11, 2005

“I commend Senator Burr as Chairman of this Subcommittee for holding today’s so we can better understand the biological threats presented by both man and animal today and in the years to come. I look forward to working with him to lead the HELP Committee in developing the legislation we need to respond to the ever-present danger of a biological outbreak or a bioterror attack.

Very soon, we will be outlining our principles and our process for crafting legislation that we will bring before the HELP Committee this summer. This hearing is critically important to alert us all about the nature of the threats we face, and to remind us of the potential consequences if Congress fails to act.

Over the years, time and technology have both conspired to change the nature of the forces that can be used against us to challenge the security of our nation and the strength of our economy. Unlike the old weapons of war, “bioterrorism” and “pandemic” are issues that we now must be concerned with for the sake of this nation’s health and our economy. The military threats of the last century came from countries that could easily be identified. Attacks of bioterrorism and pandemic, however, can come from any part of the world and appear in forms that have never been seen before.

Though we’ve made remarkable strides to identify our nation’s weaknesses with regard to biological threats, the fact remains that our defenses on these fronts are far from perfect. Despite the best efforts of Congress and the Administration, there still are holes in our biological defense that must be filled to ensure the safety of public health as well as national security.

Clearly, we have the scientific knowledge, the technology, and the resources, including access to the World Health Organization, to face this challenge. What’s missing though, is a comprehensive plan to rally and coordinate these resources to strengthen our overall defense against biological threats and bioterror attacks. Senator Burr and I are committed to making this mission the number one priority of this Subcommittee.

Since the beginning of the 21st Century the threat that we face from infectious disease has become clear. In the recent past we have seen the U.S. Capitol attacked with Anthrax by terrorists, the emergence of a never before seen disease, SARS, which infected thousands and rapidly spread across the globe, and more recently, the emergence of a horrifically deadly Marburg Hemorrhagic Fever. In addition, the news regularly contains stories about the emergence of a deadly strain of avian flu. Taken together, these incidents have changed the way we view disease surveillance and they compel us to take a new look at the way in which we view our national health preparedness. It is clear that

infectious disease can be a weapon and protecting our nation's health necessarily involves worldwide disease surveillance.

To help us consider these issues I appreciate Professor Deutch's appearance here today to help with our discussion of the threats of the 21st Century so we may better understand how we might best be prepared for any eventuality. As Professor Deutch is a professor of Chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, I look forward to hearing about his assessment of the threat we face and what needs to be done to mitigate that threat.

I also look forward to hearing from the witnesses on our second panel. Dr. Rodier of the World Health Organization will share his view on the role that organizations like the World Health Organization play in detecting outbreaks as they occur and marshalling the resources that are needed to meet these challenges around the world. His perspective will be interesting to hear and vital for us to consider. I also look forward to the testimony of Dr. Venter, Dr. Hearne, and Dr. Fineberg who will further describe the nature of the threat that we can expect to face and what our response should be.

Whether the threat is made by man or occurs naturally, we need to be prepared. That's why I look forward to working with Subcommittee Chairman Burr, Ranking Member Kennedy, and my fellow Subcommittee and Committee Members to develop legislation this year to create a viable and innovative industry to supply us with the countermeasures, antidotes, and detection tools we must have if we are to ensure the safety of the people of our nation and the world."