

Opening Statement of Chairman Rand Paul
“The Department of Homeland Security’s Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2026”
May 20, 2025

The Department of Homeland Security is a \$100 billion agency encompassing 16 different components, from the Transportation Security Administration to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

It has grown into an unwieldy bureaucracy rife with unaccountable power and wasteful spending. Characteristics, all too common in large federal institutions.

Before your tenure, DHS had quietly expanded its scope, using taxpayer dollars to surveil American citizens, censor speech, and even fund high risk virus research-- all with little to no oversight.

I commend you and the Trump administration for ending all government sponsored censorship using DHS personnel.

Just last night, I received the first set of records from the department regarding Tulsi Gabbard placement on the TSA Quiet Skies watch list.

These documents confirm our suspicions. Federal Air Marshals surveilled the now Director of National Intelligence during domestic flights in 2024, reporting back information related to her appearance and even how many electronic she was observed using.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. TSA is not the only DHS component running secretive programs behind closed doors. Most Americans would be shocked to learn that DHS funds both classified and unclassified biological research right here on U.S. soil.

Under your leadership, the department has begun producing subpoenaed records revealing deeply concerning experiments with biological threat agents. In one case, researchers proposed combining elements of two weakened anthrax strains to re-engineer a version capable of causing disease again.

These are experiments that we cannot countenance. You heard that right. DHS was using taxpayer dollars to try to recreate a fully virulent anthrax strain by engineering it from less dangerous components. That sure sounds like gain of function to me.

At the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center, also known as NBACC, scientists have conducted repeated experiments, aerosolized some of the world's deadliest pathogens the plague, Ebola, and more, exploring how to increase their lethality and transmissibility, we have documents indicating these experiments have continued during the Biden administration.

NBACC's lab sits adjacent to NIH's Integrated Research Facility at Fort Detrick-- the very same facility where just recently Secretary Kennedy and Director Bhattacharya halted research following a disturbing biosafety instance in which a researcher intentionally slashed another's biosafety suit while handling Ebola. Inexcusable.

Afterwards, DHS personnel were reportedly seen padlocking freezers inside the NIH lab. So naturally, I want to know what exactly is the relationship between DHS and NIH at Fort Detrick?

What overlap exists between their work?

It shouldn't take a personal altercation and a compromised biosafety suit to initiate oversight. But here we are.

And why is the Department of Homeland Security an agency meant to defend the homeland, conducting experiments with pathogens capable of killing millions in the first place? These are questions and the taxpayers deserve answers.

Some might say it's about preparedness, but when does preparedness cross in the line into recklessness?

At what point does an attempt to prevent catastrophe actually increase the likelihood of one?

This is only the tip of the iceberg of the reckless research quietly being funded out of the Department of Homeland Security, some of it conducted on behalf of other federal agencies under the agency's "Work for Others" program obscuring the ability of Congress and the public to follow the money.

This isn't just a domestic safety concern—it's a diplomatic one. DHS conducts internal Arms Control Compliance Assessments to evaluate whether its projects could violate—or appear to violate—the Biological Weapons Convention.

That's why Congress must pass my bipartisan, Risky Research Review Act to establish independent oversight, a federally funded gain-of-function research and other potentially dangerous studies.

We don't even have a universally accepted definition of gain-of-function, allowing researchers to pick and choose the standards that suit them. That's not real oversight.

Secretary Noem, I appreciate your demonstrated commitment to reversing the obstruction of your predecessor and pushing back on efforts by entrenched bureaucrats within the department to delay, redact, and resist oversight.

You've inherited a difficult task restoring accountability to a department that has strayed from its founding mission.

This is a pivotal moment. I look forward to continuing to work with you to bring about long overdue transparency to the American people. Thank you.