

Opening Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

“Nuclear Terrorism: Strengthening Our Domestic Defenses, Part I”

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
June 30, 2010

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Safeguarding our nation against the threat of nuclear terrorism is one of the most important responsibilities of the Department of Homeland Security. The WMD Commission predicted that “it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013.”

Technological innovation is a critical element in our efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism. It is, therefore, troubling that the Department’s efforts to develop a next-generation technology for scanning cargo for nuclear materials at ports of entry have been less than successful. The Advanced Portal (ASP) program has repeatedly encountered problems since its inception in 2004.

As a result, ASP has been relegated to being a potential secondary scanning tool, although the technology has yet to receive certification from DHS for even this limited function.

Given the unwavering ambitions of America’s enemies, our nation cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past.

The DHS office currently responsible for making decisions about the development, testing, evaluation, and acquisition of detection equipment is the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO). DNDO must make well-informed and threat-based investment decisions to meet the challenge of interdicting illicit nuclear material at our nation’s borders and within our country.

Given our nation’s significant investment in this critical area, DNDO also must serve as a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars. As we navigate the road forward, the Department must have a clearer strategy for developing the next-generation of scanning technologies to detect and identify shielded and unshielded nuclear materials.

The three organizations represented at our hearing today, GAO, CRS, and the National Research Council, have all produced recent reports that have found significant problems with the ASP program. They can give us valuable insights into the challenges the Department confronts, and that Congress must consider, as we move beyond the ASP program.

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