

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STEPHEN F. LYNCH

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE
AND POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HEARING ON**

**“Protecting the Protectors: An Assessment of Front-line Federal Workers in
Response to the H1N1 Outbreak”**

Thursday, May 14, 2009

IN WAKE OF THE H1N1 FLU OUTBREAK, THIS AFTERNOON’S HEARING HAS BEEN CONVENED TO EXAMINE AND DISCUSS CURRENT FEDERAL WORKER SAFETY PROTECTIONS AND POLICIES. AS CHAIR OF THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE SUBCOMMITTEE, IT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES - ESPECIALLY FRONTLINE FEDERAL WORKERS WHO ARE TASKED WITH THE AWESOME JOB OF KEEPING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SAFE AND HEALTHY.

WHILE WE’VE ALL SEEN THE HEADLINES AND HAVE READ VARIOUS REPORTS ON H1N1 (OR SWINE) FLU CASES, TODAY’S HEARING IS SPECIFICALLY INTENDED TO REVIEW EXISTING POLICIES AT KEY FEDERAL AGENCIES RELATING TO EMPLOYEE PRECAUTIONARY BEHAVIOR AND THE USE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE WEAR. ENTITLED “*PROTECTING THE PROTECTORS: AN ASSESSMENT OF FRONT-LINE FEDERAL WORKERS IN RESPONSE TO THE H1N1 OUTBREAK,*” TODAY’S PROCEEDINGS WILL PROVIDE OUR AGENCY WITNESSES AN OPPORTUNITY TO ELABORATE ON THEIR RESPECTIVE RESPONSES TO THE H1N1 VIRUS OUTBREAK. TODAY’S HEARING ALSO AFFORDS US THE CHANCE TO ENTER INTO A DIALOGUE ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FUTURE POLICIES THAT WOULD GOVERN AND LAY OUT THE RIGHTS OF FRONT LINE WORKERS TO ACCESS AND DON PROTECTIVE WEAR DURING A TIME OF POTENTIAL CRISIS - - BE IT THE RESULT OF A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY OR A MAN-MADE DISASTER.

SINCE NINE-ELEVEN, OUR COUNTRY AS A WHOLE HAS AWAKENED TO THE NEED FOR ONGOING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS. SUBSEQUENTLY, FEDERAL AGENCIES HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH DRAWING UP A VARIETY OF DISASTER SCENARIOS SO THAT OUR GOVERNMENT CAN RESPOND EFFECTIVELY AND SWIFLY IN A TIME OF CRISIS. HOWEVER, ALL ONE HAS TO DO IS RECALL THE HORRIFIC EVENTS FOLLOWING HURRICANE KATRINA ON THE GULF COAST TO BE REMINDED THAT MUCH WORK IN THE AREA OF EMERGENCY

PREPAREDNESS AND CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT REMAINS TO BE DONE.

IN ADDITION TO THE WORK NEEDED TO ENSURE THE PUBLIC'S SAFETY, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT AGENCIES IMPLEMENT ADEQUATE AND UNIFORM WORKER PROTECTION POLICIES FOR THE EMPLOYEES WHO PROTECT THE NATION AS PART OF THEIR DAILY DUTIES. AMIDST THE GENERAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING EFFORTS UNDETAKE BY AGENCIES TO SAFEGUARD THE PUBLIC, SUFFICIENT TIME MUST BE DEVOTED TO DEVELOP AND EXECUTE SENSIBLE POLICIES AIMED AT SECURING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE VERY EMPLOYEES WHO WILL BE CALLED UPON TO RESPOND IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY. WITHOUT SUCH POLICIES, NOT ONLY IS THE HEALTH OF FRONT LINE EMPLOYEES BEING PUT AT RISK, BUT THE HEALTH OF THEIR FAMILIES AND THE GENERAL WELFARE OF THE PUBLIC IS ALSO PLACED AT RISK. IN SHORT, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CANNOT ABLY RESPOND TO EMERGENCIES IF THE VERY PERSONNEL NEEDED AS PART OF THAT RESPONSE ARE THEMSELVES COMPROMISED.

FRONT LINE FEDERAL WORKERS, THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS, THE COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY RESIDE AND WHERE THEIR KIDS GO TO SCHOOL- DESERVE TO BE REASSURED THAT THEIR EMPLOYER-WHICH IN THIS CASE IS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT- HAS DONE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO GUARANTEE THEIR PROTECTION WHILE ON THE JOB.

I'D LIKE TO THANK THE WITNESSES FOR APPEARING HERE TODAY AS WE TAKE A HARD LOOK INTO WHAT IS—AND WHAT IS NOT-BEING DONE TO KEEP OUR FRONT LINE FEDERAL WORKERS SAFE.