House Committee on Science and Technology

Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

Hearing on
The Science of Security Part II:
Technical Problems Continue to
Hinder Advanced Radiation Monitors

November 17, 2009

Opening Statement of the Honorable Paul Broun, M.D. (R-GA)
Ranking Member

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome the witnesses here today, and thank them for participating in our follow-up hearing on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Advanced Spectroscopic Portal (ASP) program. This afternoon we will be brought up to date on the Department's ongoing development of next generation Radiation Portal Monitors and get an update from the General Accountability Office (GAO) on their continuing work.

As I said at our earlier hearing this past summer, this program is certainly not out of the woods. The latest Field Validation Test revealed additional problems that will have to be overcome before moving forward. I hope DNDO will be able to give us some insight today on what we can expect from this program in terms of future paths forward. With considerable taxpayer money on the line, questionable improvements over current capabilities, an outstanding cost-benefit analysis, and a confusing acquisitions history that unfortunately has morphed Research and Development (R&D) with procurement, this program is rapidly approaching a point where the Federal Government has to decide to "fish or cut bait."

I'm also concerned with the fact that considerable public funding has been expended on developing a technology that the private sector was developing in parallel on its own dime. DHS as a whole (and DNDO, CBP, and DHS S&T individually) should be focusing on long-term high-risk high-reward technology, not providing seed money for Commercial Off –The-Shelf (COTS) equipment. That being said, I realize that DHS' mission is vastly different from the Department of Energy's (DoE) and the Department of Defense's (DOD), and that they have additional requirements that demand a more robust system.

GAO and the Academy made several recommendations over the last few years. I trust that DNDO and CBP will be able to update this Committee on how they are responding to those recommendations, and where they plan to go from here. The nation expects a lot from the Department, and I hope that we aren't developing tunnel vision by focusing too much on one method of conveyance and not seeing the forest through the trees. The Department has an enormous task of securing our borders, not just at points of entry, but

all along our borders. Spending billions of dollars to secure the front door or our house, doesn't seem very rational if we are just going to leave the back door open. That is not to say we should do nothing at all, but rather everything we do should be put in the context of a well thought out Global Nuclear Detection Architecture.

As I said earlier this summer, many of the issues we are dealing with today could have been prevented by engaging the end-users earlier in the process, clearly defining requirements, developing clear architectural priorities, and simply following a clear acquisition process. This Committee is no stranger to programs that have set aside these best practices for expediency's sake. I look forward to working with the Department and the majority to make sure any decision made is in the best interest of our nation's security, the taxpayer, and our economy.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

Thank you.

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