

Opening Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

Preventing Nuclear Terrorism: Hard Lessons
Learned From Troubled Investments

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing to continue the Committee's work on the threat of nuclear terrorism. Today we will hear testimony about a much-criticized DHS program to deploy advanced radiation-detection technology at our ports of entry.

Detecting nuclear materials at ports of entry – before they enter the stream of commerce – must be a high priority. The SAFE Port Act, which I co-authored, enhanced the federal government's ability to detect illicit radiological materials by requiring

that all cargo containers be scanned for radiation at the 22 largest U.S. seaports. This mandate covers 98 percent of cargo coming into the United States.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has now completed deployment of the required radiation portal monitors. These first-generation portal monitors detect radiation from any type of material in a cargo container and, as a result, are often set off by innocent sources of trace radiation such as ceramic tiles or even kitty litter. CBP officers then have to resolve the alarms through sometimes time-consuming measures.

To avoid these delays and to be able to react more quickly to potentially dangerous materials, DHS has spent the last few years developing next-generation technology that will determine the type

of radiation that is being emitted. If effective, this will allow CBP officers to know immediately if a cargo container contains innocent or potentially threatening materials.

The DHS office responsible for making decisions about the development, testing, evaluation, and acquisition of detection equipment is the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO). This Office must make well-informed and threat-based investment decisions to meet the challenge of interdicting illicit material at our nation's borders and within our country. Given our nation's significant investment in this critical area, DNDO must also serve as a responsible steward of taxpayers' dollars.

In the past, DNDO has been criticized for its management of technology-development programs.

It has responded to concerns of a disconnect between laboratory testing and real-world operational use by engaging CBP in the development and testing process.

DNDO's technological development efforts support not only CBP screening officers at U.S. ports, but CBP officers at 58 foreign seaports, Coast Guard crews on the high seas, and local law enforcement cooperating in targeted detection efforts around our major cities. Successful development and acquisition of equipment by DNDO is vital for nuclear-detection efforts that other DHS components and local governments are implementing.

Our witnesses today can give us valuable insights into the challenges that the DNDO and its partners confront – challenges which Congress must

examine as we consider our nation's investments in an effective nuclear- detection architecture. I look forward to their testimony.

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