

Ranking Member Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) Opening Statement

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CYBERSECURITY, INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION, AND SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES

“The DHS and DOE National Laboratories: Finding Efficiencies and Optimizing Outputs in Homeland Security Research and Development”

Thursday, April 19, 2012 - 10 a.m.

Thank you for holding this hearing on the National Laboratories and how the Department can best utilize these valuable resources to accomplish our homeland security goals.

Mr. Chairman, I too, want to welcome our witnesses today, some have traveled from the great state of California, and we appreciate their participation. I also want to welcome Deputy Under Secretary Gerstein to the Subcommittee. He is relatively new to his position, obviously well qualified, and since arriving has provided enthusiastic and knowledgeable leadership efforts to S&T. During his short time on the job, he has proven to be a valuable asset to Under Secretary O’Toole. I am looking forward to his testimony today.

The Department, and S&T in particular, supports a broad range of scientific and engineering research and development. Its purposes are wide-ranging and address specific concerns such as chemical security, biodefense, transportation security, and nuclear detection.

An important segment of the Department’s laboratory’s effort is that it fosters the development of our country’s scientific, engineering, and technical workforce, which influences students at our universities and even high schools. When teachers and students can see that there is interesting and substantial work to be done in the sciences at our laboratories, they show an incredible amount of interest in striving to work there. Important things go on in our laboratories, and they are seen as good and significant places to work.

Our scientists, researchers, engineers, and technicians work hard to deliver solutions grounded in science and supported by innovative engineering, and this strengthens U.S. innovation and competitiveness in the global economy.

This Committee has a long-standing interest in the strength of the Department’s research and development enterprise and in providing support for its R&D activities.

We must anticipate the needs of our laboratories and the DOE labs, and provide the best support and oversight that can help provide solutions to our toughest scientific, technical, and programmatic challenges.

However, recent and projected budget cuts passed by the majority are driving difficult decisions such as the prioritization, and sometimes the elimination, of R&D projects. This is causing stress among competing priorities within the Department's S&T Directorate and its R&D portfolio.

Congress will play a central role in defining the nation's R&D priorities as it makes decisions with respect to the size and distribution of homeland security R&D funding.

We have expressed our serious concerns about the drastic decreases voted on by this Congress, and passed by the majority, in the level of federal funding for homeland security R&D funding. As the FY13 appropriations process moves forward, it faces two overarching issues: the extent to which the federal R&D investment can grow, and what little R&D funding available will be prioritized and allocated. The Department and particular, the S&T Directorate, will need to justify and make transparent its R&D investments.

President Obama's science advisor, John Holdren, and others—have raised concerns about the potential harm of a "boom-bust" approach to federal R&D funding as seen in past, like rapid growth followed by much slower growth, flat funding, or even decline.

Critics assert that there has been a variety of damages from this boom-bust cycle, including interruptions and cancellations of needed research projects, decreased student interest in pursuing graduate studies, and reduced employment prospects for the large number of researchers with advanced degrees.

More broadly, in a 2009 speech before members of the National Academy of Sciences, President Obama put forth a goal of increasing the national investment in R&D to more than 3% of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). But, as they say, the devil is in the details, and the details are what we are to hear about today.

This Subcommittee and Full Committee have been real supporters of the Department's R&D and National Labs, but we need a better, clearer understanding of how things have gotten better, how management oversight of R&D projects has increased, and what is the path forward as we look forward the drastic funding cuts coming out of this Congress.