

Ranking Member William R. Keating (D-MA) Opening Statement

**Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management
Committee on Homeland Security**

“Using Unmanned Aerial Systems Within the Homeland: Security Game Changer?”

July 19, 2012

I want to thank Chairman McCaul for holding today’s hearing to examine the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or UAVs, within the homeland.

For years, the United States has successfully deployed UAVs in military operations throughout Iraq and Afghanistan.

More recently, changes in the law have paved the way for public agencies – including State and local law enforcement – to pursue UAVs technology for law enforcement use.

At present, the impact of UAVs flying in the national airspace and participating in day to day activities like watering fields and spraying pesticides is unknown; however, there are both risks and benefits to expanding this technology within the homeland.

As a Member representing a maritime district, I am impressed with the ability of UAVs to map hurricanes, respond to severe flooding, and assist the U.S. Coast Guard in search and rescue missions.

The unique manner in which UAVs conduct surveillance and reconnaissance has also resulted in successful military missions; however, it is these same capabilities that make UAVs so disconcerting at home.

To that end, I am concerned about the lack of oversight on these vehicles, the fact that there is a continuing need to define what they can and cannot be used for and finally, the absence of privacy safeguards that currently do not exist.

I understand the general public’s concern. UAVs can be equipped with thermal-imaging sensors; WiFi sniffers; license plate readers and facial recognition cameras.

Moreover, they can hover over the same location for extended periods of time, collecting information and searching targets and properties within view without first obtaining a warrant.

Some law enforcement agencies have already procured UAVs capable of firing non-lethal weapons and there aren’t any rules, laws or regulations in place to prevent these agencies from fully weaponizing this equipment.

I do not mean to use this hearing as an opportunity to fear monger because as a former District Attorney, I do not believe that it’s law enforcement’s intent to employ these technologies in a harmful manner, but I am seriously concerned that there is not one single Federal agency responsible for overseeing the operations of UAVs in our national airspace.

Moreover, safety issues, such as: sense and avoid technologies that enable UAVs to avoid other aircraft; the absence of a dedicated radio frequency for UAVs; and the assurance of constant command and control on the ground – continue to exist.

As Chairman McCaul knows, I take a particular interest in airport perimeter security and the deployment of these technologies makes me wonder how far we are stretching this perimeter when airplanes are made to share the skies with UAVs. What does this mean for passenger safety?

Furthermore, as we will learn this morning, the risk faced by hackers and spoofers seeking to intercept and use for their own purposes information captured by UAVs has not been fully addressed.

As a result, I am looking forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the best path forward as we seek to safely and lawfully integrate UAVs in our national airspace.

As we grapple with UAVs and the privacy and safety issues they present, I would be remiss if I did not also mention a much safer and non-invasive unmanned technology – underwater unmanned vehicles, or UUVs – developed throughout the United States and often tested in waters, right off the Cape.

There are today an estimated 450 underwater unmanned vehicles in the U.S. military inventory.

At present, the primary missions of UUVs are mine detection and maritime security and as we've already seen with the Deepwater horizon disaster- where UUVs developed at Wood's Hole Oceanographic Institute were deployed to record the contamination of the water- there are many homeland security-related applications that can be pursued for underwater technologies, as well.