

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Hearing on “Outbreaks, Attacks, and Accidents: Combatting  
Biological Threats”**

*February 12, 2016*

Thank you for holding this hearing. Combating biological threats is a critical issue that has not been given adequate attention, but I’m hopeful today’s hearing can be another important step towards increasing our nation’s preparedness.

The Blue Ribbon Panel on Biodefense has conducted a comprehensive review of the federal government’s efforts to address the biological threat and identified what remains to be done. Before us today are two distinguished panel Members who are no strangers to this Committee: Secretary Shalala, who led the Department of Health and Human Services for eight years, and Congressman Jim Greenwood, the former Chairman of this Subcommittee. In addition, I’d like to welcome two individuals who offered their expertise to the panel: Dr. Tara

O'Toole, who served as Undersecretary for Science and Technology at the Department of Homeland Security, and Dr. Gerald Parker, who has provided leadership on these issues at the Departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Defense. Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here and for sharing your expertise.

This is not the first high-level commission to examine our nation's biodefense preparedness. Experts have repeatedly warned that our ability to respond to biological threats must be improved. However, previous commissions did not produce changes that sufficiently prepared this nation for the threats that will be discussed today.

That brings us to the Blue Ribbon Study Panel and our hearing today. The Blue Ribbon Panel, following extensive study, has suggested a series of oversight hearings addressing fourteen key areas, many of which fall under this Committee's jurisdiction.

We need to ensure that this panel's work does not become yet another undertaking by experts whose recommendations go unanswered. Congressional oversight is key to ensuring that federal departments and agencies are meeting their mandates and doing so in an effective and efficient way. And therefore, I urge the Committee to follow through on the Panel's recommendations by holding not just this session, but a series of hearings to assess the nation's ability to prepare for and respond to biological threats.

I would like to thank our panelists once again for coming and sharing their expertise. I look forward to hearing from each of you about what our nation can do to improve our biodefense network.