

Statement

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX-30)

Chair

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Members Hearing Day for FY 2021 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations

February 26, 2020

Thank you Chairwoman Roybal-Allard and Ranking Member Fleischmann for this opportunity to submit written testimony on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security.

The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology shares jurisdiction with the House Committee on Homeland Security for the Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) and the Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD), both of which would see a 13 percent cut under the President's proposed budget for FY 2021. As you know, both of these offices have significant investments in research, development, and testing of more effective and efficient tools and technologies for the homeland security missions. In addition to supporting R&D at Federal laboratories, S&T supports research at universities, where new and potentially transformative ideas are most likely to emerge. However, this proposal would cut university programs in half and eliminate five of the ten university-based centers of excellence. For an Administration which claims to prioritize homeland security, these cuts are puzzling. While the private sector can and does provide critical technological support to the agency, it is essential that the agency maintain internal capacity in R&D and technology analysis to support operations across the Department. I urge you to fund the S&T Directorate at least at last year's level of support.

The need for in-house technical expertise is especially true when it comes to understanding, detecting, preparing for, and responding to nuclear, chemical, radiological, and biological threats. The Science, Space, and Technology Committee has been pursuing active oversight of the BD21 program that is intended as the successor to Biowatch. As our investigation has uncovered, a series of poor management decisions and failure to follow best practices for technology development have put this significant investment at risk. These detection systems are too important to get wrong, not to mention the waste of taxpayer investment that will have been involved. We must continue to push the Department to conduct evidence-based technology development and procurement. At the same time, we must provide them with the resources to get it right. The Administration requested flat funding for this program at \$3.5 million. I urge you to fully fund this request.