Summary of Meeting Proceedings

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On March 1, 2012, the Center for Biosecurity of UPMC and the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) convened Congressional staff, government officials, biosecurity organizations, and key stakeholders to discuss the importance of reauthorizing the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA). With a standing room only audience of more than 100 attendees, the response to this issue was impressive, with significant numbers of both Congressional staff and members of the biosecurity community at large in attendance for a lively, standing room only meeting.

This panel discussion came at a crucial juncture for the legislation, which passed out of the House of Representatives late last year, but had yet to be put to a vote in the Senate after being endorsed by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. During the March 1 event, Congressional representatives from both chambers, along with representatives from the White House, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), came together to show support for the legislation. All of the presenters shared observations on the significance of PAHPA to their work.

Dr. Tom Inglesby described PAHPA as “crucial for preparedness [because] without this bill, there would be no law and less reliable funding for the programs we depend on to be prepared for natural disasters, pandemics, and terrorism.”

Indeed, noted Dr. Inglesby, during the past 5 years, the Act has improved the nation’s public health and medical preparedness significantly:

- Secretary of HHS was established as the lead authority for all federal public health and medical response to public health emergencies and incidents covered by the National Response Framework
- Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) was established within HHS
- State and local preparedness efforts were funded through expansion of the Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) cooperative agreement grant program
- Healthcare preparedness was advanced through Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) grants
- Medical countermeasure (MCM) development was accelerated through important modifications to Project BioShield and establishment of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA).

Speakers

Robert “Bob” Casey, Jr., U.S. Senator, Pennsylvania

Jesse Goodman, Chief Scientist, Office of the Chief Scientist, FDA

Richard Hatchett, Chief Medical Officer and Deputy Director for Strategic Sciences, BARDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, HHS

Tom Inglesby, CEO and Director, Center for Biosecurity of UPMC

Robert Kadlec, Former Special Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Senior Director for Biological Defense Policy

Brian Kamoie, Senior Director for Preparedness Policy, National Security Staff, Executive Office of the President

Ali Khan, Director, Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, CDC

Lynn Kidder, President, The WMD Center

Mike Rogers, U.S. Representative for Michigan’s 8th Congressional District

Philip K. Russell, Former Senior Advisor, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Health Emergency Preparedness, HHS

Scott Whitaker, Chief Operating Officer, Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO)
The meeting was opened by Scott Whitaker, who underscored the importance of PAHPA to preparedness. Senator Robert P. Casey and Congressman Mike Rogers delivered opening remarks as well. Senator Casey, a key sponsor of the reauthorization legislation in the U.S. Senate, discussed the importance of PAHPA, emphasizing that “if there is one thing we’ve learned, it’s that we have to prepare for the worst.” Likewise, Congressman Rogers observed that PAHPA “puts us on the road to protecting the United States from a very real threat.” As a sponsor of the PAHPA reauthorization legislation that passed out of the House of Representatives, Congressman Rogers noted similarities between the legislation passed by the House and the legislation moving through the Senate, and he expressed optimism that the 2 bills could be reconciled and sent to the president to be signed into law.

Dr. Robert Kadlec moderated the first panel, which featured Dr. Philip K. Russell and Lynne Kidder. Discussing current challenges in addressing biological threats, Ms. Kidder urged Congress to pass the law, arguing that “we can’t assuredly prevent disasters, so we need to prepare for them in the best possible way.” Dr. Russell agreed, emphasizing the importance of this legislation, particularly given the capabilities of modern technology and the evolving threat of biological weapons; he cautioned that “it is no longer true that technical difficulty prevents terrorists from using biology to attack.”

Dr. Inglesby moderated the second panel, which included Brian Kamoie, and Drs. Ali Khan, Richard Hatchett, and Jesse Goodman. Each discussed critical programs currently supported by PAHPA.

Surveying the crowded room, Dr. Hatchett called the turnout inspiring, and noted that “2011 was a banner year for BARDA.” He noted that the reauthorization of PAHPA would be an “important reaffirmation of our efforts,” emphasizing that “funding advanced research and manufacturing is an important statement to industry [and is] crucial to the country’s biodefense MCM program.”

Dr. Goodman explained the ways in which reauthorization of the PAHPA legislation would help FDA better protect the country against public health threats—by modifying FDA’s authority to grant Emergency Use Authorizations and making provisions that would enable FDA to preposition products within states.

Dr. Khan credited PAHPA with advancements in laboratory capacity, epidemiology and surveillance, MCM stockpiling, and state and local capacity to address public health emergencies. Dr. Khan also reminded Congress that “the threat environment is unaffected by the fiscal environment.” He noted that PAHPA’s all-hazards approach supports the people, systems, and tools required to respond to large events; in fact, the swift public health response to the recent cantaloupe-borne outbreak of listeria in Colorado was possible due to funding from PAHPA.

Mr. Kamoie spoke off the record but offered that “the Administration supports efforts to reauthorize the PAHPA.”