

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC

Burr, Kennedy Introduce Bill to Improve
Biosecurity Measures
Bill will modernize regulations for bioterrorism agents

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, February 26, 2009

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Richard Burr (R-NC), along with U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), introduced the *Select Agent Program and Biosafety Improvement Act of 2009*, to improve America’s approach to biosecurity by reauthorizing the Select Agent Program and enhancing the safety of biological research laboratories. The Select Agent Program regulates the transfer, possession, and use of biological substances that pose a serious threat to public health and could be used for bioterrorism. Authorization for the program expired in September of 2007. Representative Jane Harman (D-CA) introduced similar legislation in the House of Representatives.

“We must support scientific research while also making sure select agents are kept out of the hands of terrorists and are used safely and securely in our laboratories,” Burr said.

“Reauthorizing the Select Agent Program is vital to ensuring our nation’s safety and security, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to reauthorize and improve the program.”

“Our ability to protect Americans against modern-day dangers depends on robust scientific research to counter biological threats. The bill that we introduce today helps protect Americans from biological threats, while also protecting scientific freedom and integrity,” said Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

“The threat of bioterrorism – whether a small pox outbreak, pandemic flu, or proliferation of deadly ricin – is real. Weaponized biological agents can spread and infect at a ferocious pace,” said Rep. Harman. “This isn’t about playing the ‘fear card,’ this is a call for a better action plan. A sophisticated system for tracking deadly agents and securing the nation’s labs – potential Petri dishes for WMDs – should be a staple component of our national defense.”

In addition to reauthorizing the Select Agent Program, the *Select Agent Program and Biosafety Improvement Act* would evaluate federal oversight of our most secure biological laboratories, improve training for laboratory workers, and establish an incident reporting system to help identify protocols for safety and security improvements. The recent report by the Commission

on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism called for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to tighten government oversight of high containment labs.

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