

First Congressionally-directed Look Into FBI's Handling of Amerithrax Attacks

(Washington, D.C.) – The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) will investigate the scientific and technical methods used by the FBI during its investigation into the 2001 anthrax attacks, something U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) requested earlier this year. Holt and four colleagues (three in the House, one in the Senate) requested the investigation after the FBI announced it was closing its investigation into the 2001 anthrax letter attacks. The GAO investigation will be the first Congressionally-directed investigation of the FBI's handling of the case.

The attacks evidently originated from a postal box in Holt's Central New Jersey congressional district, killing five, and disrupting the lives and livelihoods of many of his constituents. The attacks greatly contributed to the national fear of terrorism and has affected the response of our nation to these attacks to this day. Holt has consistently raised questions about the federal investigation into the attacks.

"The American people need credible answers to many questions raised by the original attacks and the subsequent FBI handling of the case," Holt said. "I'm pleased the GAO has responded to our request and will look into the scientific methods used by the FBI."

In September 2008, the FBI requested that the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) examine a relatively narrow range of scientific questions about the FBI's scientific conclusions in the so-called "Amerithrax" case, and those findings are expected to be released by year's end. At Holt's request, GAO will take a much broader approach in examining the scientific underpinnings of the FBI's investigation.

Specifically, the GAO will seek to answer the following questions: 1) What microbial and technical forensic methods did the FBI use to conclude that Bruce Ivins was the perpetrator of the 2001 anthrax attack; how reliable and reproductive were those methods; and were the methods validated? 2) What scientific concerns and uncertainties, if any, remain? 3) What agencies, including intelligence agencies, are responsible for monitoring high containment laboratories in the U.S. and abroad; how do they monitor these laboratories; and how effective is their monitoring?

Holt continues to insist on the need for passage of his legislation to create a comprehensive Congressional commission to investigate the 2001 anthrax attacks and the federal

government's response to and investigation of the attacks. The bipartisan commission would make recommendations to the President and Congress on how the country can best prevent and respond to any future bioterrorism attack.

“In the wake of this bungled FBI investigation, all of us – but especially the families of the victims of the anthrax attacks – deserve credible answers about how the attacks happened and whether the case really is closed,” Holt said. “The Commission, like the 9/11 Commission, would do that, and it would help American families know that the government is better prepared to protect them and their children from future bioterrorism attacks.”

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