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Washington, D.C. — The House Energy and Commerce Committee voted unanimously Wednesday to establish a new office designed to accelerate the development of medical countermeasures against bioterrorism and pandemic health threats.

The bill, H.R. 5533, introduced by Reps. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., and Mike Rogers, R-Mich., would create the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) within the Department of Health and Human Services.

"We're in a race against time with both terrorists and nature," said Eshoo, a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee. "We can't depend on the marketplace alone to deliver medicines we need to save lives after another anthrax attack, a 'dirty bomb,' or a virulent pandemic."

BARDA would coordinate federal efforts to develop innovative new antidotes and vaccines against biological weapons, such as small pox, and against rapidly evolving infectious diseases, such as Asian bird flu.

The lack of commercial demand for such drugs has discouraged companies from developing them and created a funding gap known as the "Valley of Death"; BARDA would bridge that gap by making interim payments at key development milestones, thereby encouraging companies to pursue medicines showing promise in early research.

The bill, known as the Biodefense and Pandemic Vaccine and Drug Development Act of 2006, would authorize \$160 million a year to fund BARDA in 2007 and 2008.

"I hope the House will recognize the same urgency as our Committee did today and quickly send this bill to the President before Congress adjourns," Eshoo said. "This is a race we can't afford to lose."

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