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DHS secretary, governor tour BRI facility

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Less than a month after Manhattan was officially named as the next location of the National Bio and Agro-Defense facility, the Department of Homeland Security is already looking at how it can utilize the resources already on the K-State campus.

In her first trip outside of Washington, D.C., since taking the job as DHS secretary, Janet Napolitano toured the Biosecurity Research Institute north of the Veterinary Medical Center with Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius as well as area and state leaders.

"In reality, this is the best place in the United States to have this type of facility because of the expertise in the animal health community that already exists here in Kansas and Manhattan," said Napolitano, former governor of Arizona.

While the BRI is a Biosafety Level 3 facility and the NBAF will be a Biosafety Level 4 facility, Tom Thornton, president of the Kansas Bioscience Authority, said the BRI can research all but three of the diseases researched at the current NBAF facility on Plum Island, N.Y.

Napolitano said an evaluation team from the DHS is coming next week to determine how the BRI can be used to jump-start research projects for the NBAF before it is finished in 2015 or 2016.



Nathaniel LaRue



Nathaniel LaRue

DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano and Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius discuss the future of the National Bio and Agro-Defense facility in Manhattan with local press on Tuesday afternoon. Secretary Napolitano was in Manhattan to tour the Biosecurity Research Institute with the governor as well as local and state leaders.

Though the BRI is still testing to see if all its facilities are functioning properly, it should be fully operational by the end of this spring, Thornton said.

"That's the point; if we can get started, why wait until 2015?" Thornton said.

Both state representatives from Manhattan and the state senator from Manhattan attended and spoke with Napolitano.

"I was pleased that she got to tour the facility and see the grounds and see the way we put this together," said Sydney Carlin, D-Manhattan.

The state has already pledged \$206 million to the NBAF construction and infrastructure updates, Carlin said, and will work to raise any additional funds not provided by the DHS through private donors and the Kansas Bioscience Authority.

Outside the BRI, several community members who were dressed in bright yellow T-shirts held large signs displaying their objection to the construction of the NBAF on the K-State campus.

Bill Dorsett, a 30-year Manhattan resident, said he was concerned about the threat of some of the most infectious diseases to livestock escaping the facility - especially considering the facility's proximity to large populations of cattle in the middle part of the country.

"It has to be perfect, and these labs haven't shown themselves to be perfect," Dorsett said.

The BRI was the first stop for Napolitano and Sebelius in their tour of Kansas. Tomorrow, Sebelius and Napolitano, who, as DHS secretary, will also oversee FEMA, will talk with emergency managers in Topeka on state preparedness issues and tour the Greensburg, Kan., community.

On another note, Sebelius, whose name has surfaced as a candidate for the open position as director of the U.S. Health and Human Services Department, deflected answers pertaining to the HHS position.