



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas)
Committee on Homeland Security
“The Critical Role of First Responders: Sharing Lessons Learned from Past Attacks”
Remarks as Prepared**

Chairman McCaul: The United States continues to face an ever-evolving terrorist threat from al Qaeda, its affiliates and others. We are seeing the rise of radical Islam in Africa, attacks by the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the civil war in Syria has provided a safe haven for terrorists to train, which is now flowing deep into Iraq. As I speak, a terrorist organization too extreme for al Qaeda continues to march toward Baghdad leaving a trail of death, looting and prison breaks.

These terrorists, and others around the world like AQAP, are intent on attacking the homeland. Just as we must continue to combat these threats overseas, we must also remain vigilant at home and be prepared to respond to attacks that reach our shores. Today’s hearing examines these terrorist events, first responder efforts before, during and after these attacks and the lessons learned.

Each day, first responders save lives and enhance the overall resiliency of our Nation. However, the 9/11 terrorist attacks forever changed the role of our emergency response providers. Since that day, these brave men and women have been the first on the scene during the 2009 shooting at Fort Hood and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, among others. These tragic events remind us of the critical role first responders play in the Nation’s ability to react quickly, whether it be to a terrorist attack or natural disaster. Lessons learned from previous efforts are vital to increasing our ability to prepare for and respond to future incidents.

We owe it to these heroes and the American people to focus our efforts on doing all we can to ensure first responders are properly prepared for whatever catastrophe they encounter. From every incident, there are aspects of the response that went well and things that can be improved. We can - and must - learn from both. This Committee was formed in the aftermath of 9/11 to better protect the American people against a terrorist attack and fulfills its mission by ensuring that first responders, law enforcement personnel and the Department of Homeland Security have the capabilities, training and tools needed to prepare for, prevent and respond to future attacks.

In addition to the vital response and recovery mission, first responders are critical partners in preventing attacks. State and local law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical responders know their communities and will be the first to identify suspicious behavior and other potential security threats. First responders should have access to real-time threat and suspicious behavior reports, which are key to detecting terrorism. In turn, first responders must have access to all applicable Federal information so that they can do their job to the best of their ability. This was clear in the tragic Boston Marathon bombing last year.

Members of this Committee are committed to seeing that the recommendations in the Boston Marathon bombing report are implemented, most importantly that information sharing between federal, state and local partners is improved.

I would like to recognize the first responders testifying before us today, as well as those in the audience and across the country, for always answering the call. A simple thank you is not enough to express our gratitude for your efforts to protect the American people.

Thank you and I look forward to your testimony.

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