



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

112th Congress Organizational Meeting for the Committee on Homeland Security

January 26, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the 112th Congress Organizational Meeting for the Committee on Homeland Security:

“This year marks the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Thankfully, no attack of the magnitude of 9/11 has been successfully launched on U.S. soil since 2001.

Yet recent cases such as the thwarted bombing attempts at Times Square last year and in Spokane, Washington last week, serve to remind us that there are individuals out there who will use violence and terror to try and undermine our freedoms. The protection of this nation requires that neither fear nor favor influence the Committee’s examination of the effectiveness of our government’s homeland security efforts.

We must not only be willing to ask why, how, and who but we must also be ready to hear the answers. Every review must seek to reveal whether the Department of Homeland Security and its Federal and State partners are providing the homeland security that Congress envisioned and the American people deserve? For those of you returning to the Committee, I do not need to tell you that this Committee covers an enormous range of oversight issues.

In the 111th Congress alone, we looked at issues as diverse as aviation security, cybersecurity, emergency preparedness efforts for the disabled, the Federal Air Marshals Service, the safety and security of Federal buildings, security breaches at the White House State Dinner, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The challenge for this Committee comes when we try to translate our oversight findings into legislation. It is not due to a lack of want, will, or effort. It is because of fractured legislative jurisdiction over homeland security. Jurisdiction has been fractured since the Committee was created. The 9/11 Commission called the consolidation of congressional jurisdiction over homeland security “the most difficult and important” of all its recommendations. I am troubled to report that the new House Leadership did nothing to end the fractured state of homeland security jurisdiction. This fractured jurisdiction results in absurd outcomes— with referrals of homeland security bills often bypassing the Committee on Homeland Security altogether. But just as importantly, the failure to consolidate jurisdiction not only forces DHS to answer to over 100 Congressional committees but also denies DHS a full partner in this body.

Today, we will consider three key Committee documents— The Committee Rules, The Committee’s Oversight Plan, and A Committee Staffing Resolution. I appreciate the Chairman’s willingness to work with us to resolve our questions and concerns about these documents. I am pleased that we have been able to work in a bipartisan manner to reach a unanimous consent agreement. I look forward to working with each and every one of you to help foster a more secure and resilient nation.

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