

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Communicating With the Public During Emergencies: An Update on Federal Alert and Warning Efforts***

July 8, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee hearing entitled “Communicating With the Public During Emergencies: An Update on Federal Alert and Warning Efforts”:

“As we have seen in recent weeks, our ability to protect those in harm’s way is only as good as the warning system used to prepare them.

Since 2004, FEMA’s Integrated Public Alerts and Warning System (IPAWS) has sought to integrate new and existing alert capabilities into a comprehensive “system of systems.”

In a 2009 report, the GAO informed us that the program faced shifting program goals, lack of continuity of planning, and poorly organized program information - all of which complicated policy decisions.

Fortunately, leadership appointed by President Obama has corrected these issues and we have moved forward with implementation of IPAWS.

With the leadership of Mr. Penn, improvements have been made by achieving interoperable standards, redundancy in the network, and direct coverage for 90% of U.S. residents through at least one type of communication.

Unfortunately, for all of the positive steps in the implementation of IPAWS, without grant funding, all of the work may simply go to waste. Many state and local emergency officials such as Mr. Kniphfer with Jefferson County, Alabama, support regional alerting capability through the use of grant dollars.

As we are all aware for FY 2011, first responder grants were cut by \$786 million. These deep cuts in grant funding will hurt their capability to invest in the alert and warning technology to carry out the goal of IPAWS.

Nowhere will these cuts be felt more than in our nation’s rural areas. Not only will the major reductions in funding mean fewer if any dollars for them, but the cuts also put many of their residents at risk.

We should heed the lessons from Hurricane Katrina and recent examples by ensuring we can quickly alert the public and provide clear messages. The technology being utilized within the IPAWS program has the potential to save countless lives.

It’s an investment that we should support both at FEMA and through our First Responder Grant Program. The upcoming nationwide test of the Emergency Alert System and C-MAS launch demonstrates what can be done when good ideas and adequate resources are combined.

A truly integrated Public Emergency Alert and Warning System requires that all stakeholders work together and pursue common goals.”

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