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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

***The Chemical Facilities Anti-Terrorism Standards Program:
Addressing Its Challenges and Finding a Way Forward***

March 6, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies subcommittee hearing entitled “The Chemical Facilities Anti-Terrorism Standards Program: Addressing Its Challenges and Finding a Way Forward”:

“Congress expressed concern about the safety and security of chemical facilities long before 9/ 11.

The danger of a sudden release of hazardous chemical fumes caused by a terrorist attack is a nightmare scenario.

In 2006, Congress passed legislation providing the Department of Homeland Security with the ability to assure that chemical plants are safe and secure. This year, the authorization for that program will expire.

Much should have happened in six years. But unfortunately, there is not much progress to report.

In December 2011, we learned about the stunning lack of progress and the serious programmatic failures when an internal memo on the CFATS program was leaked.

It is my understanding that the Under Secretary stated on a prior occasion that the memo “fails to provide a complete picture of the program.”

It is difficult for any document to capture the complete picture. But while a picture may be incomplete, it still may be accurate.

Mr. Under Secretary, I hope your testimony covers whether many of the troubling assertions contained in the internal memo are accurate:

- Is the ISCD ready to conduct a compliance inspection?;
- Will inspectors will be able to review more than 20 facilities per year?;
- Does the unit suffer from low morale and perceptions of favoritism?;
- Have job descriptions been developed?
- Have in-house training courses been developed?
- How much is spent on contractors?
- Are contractors performing inherently governmental functions?

Without the answer to these questions, we cannot answer the most important question—when will the CFATS program be fully operational?

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I need to point out that a fully functioning program cannot occur in an atmosphere of blame and recrimination.

The most troubling aspect of this internal memo is that it makes clear that the management of this program has developed a belief that finger-pointing and blame are an effective way of addressing the concerns of frontline workers.

Leadership does not point fingers. Leadership joins hands and works together.

This program will only become fully functional with leadership and hard work.

Mr. Under Secretary, if you do not have that kind of leadership in this program now, I suggest you attain it quickly.

There can be no doubt that a lack of administrative clarity and management commitment impeded this program in the past.

Congress must conduct vigilant oversight to assure that the program begins to move forward.

These challenges show the need for a detailed, biennial reauthorization process.”

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