



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Full Committee Markup

March 28, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup:

“I am pleased that the Committee is considering four measures that have strong bipartisan support today. From the Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications Subcommittee, we have H.R. 3563, the “Integrated Public Alert Warning System Modernization Act,” which received unanimous support in Subcommittee.

From the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee, we have H.R. 2764, the “WMD Intelligence and Information Sharing Act of 2011” and H.R. 3140, the “Mass Transit Intelligence Prioritization Act.” Both were unanimously approved in Subcommittee.

And finally, from the Transportation Security Subcommittee, we have H.R. 2179, a bill directing TSA to transfer loose change left at airport checkpoints to the USO to maintain their network of airport centers. H.R. 2179 was also overwhelmingly approved in Subcommittee.

With respect to this measure, I would say that I fly through DCA and Atlanta-Hartsfield pretty regularly and have been impressed by the dedication of the men and women of the USO. They provide our brave service-members the care and attention they deserve 365 days-a-year.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, as much as I support these four bills, when we look back at this day, I am afraid it may be remembered more for what we are not considering than for what we are. Given your previous statements about moving cybersecurity legislation, we had expected to consider H.R. 3674, a measure authored by Subcommittee on Cybersecurity Chairman Dan Lungren. That bill was passed unanimously out of Subcommittee in February.

As you well know, there is shared interest on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers of Congress to advance legislation to bolster our Nation’s cybersecurity posture. I have been disappointed that, in the House, Democrats have been largely shut out of the Speaker’s approach to crafting such legislation. That said, I look forward to considering long-pursued cybersecurity legislation in this Committee. There is broad agreement that for any such legislation to be effective it must have three essential elements:

ONE -- It should clearly designate and solidify DHS’ dual role as both the Federal lead for protecting civilian governmental networks and supporting the private sector’s efforts to protect their own networks;

TWO -- It should help put operators of infrastructure critical to our Nation onto a path to meeting risk-based performance standards for the protection of their networks from potentially catastrophic cyber attacks; and

THREE -- It should promote voluntary information sharing between and among the private sector and DHS about hacks and other detected cyber threats, while protecting the privacy and civil liberties of Americans that work and play in cyberspace.

Given the Speaker's stated timeline for consideration of cyber legislation, I am concerned that time may be running out on this Committee to make its mark on the package presented to the House.

I am also concerned that time has been lost on bipartisan legislation that you, in the past, have said deserves timely consideration—given the homeland security ramifications.

That measure, of course, is H.R. 2356, the "WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act of 2011." As introduced by our old Committee colleague, Bill Pascrell, this bill would greatly enhance our ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a WMD attack. We have repeatedly had the WMD Commissioners before this Committee calling on us and the Congress to act on this legislation. I sincerely hope that the next time we meet, the WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act will be on the agenda.

Unfortunately, these are not the only bills that have yet to be considered, as there are a number of bills approved by Subcommittees that have yet to receive Full Committee consideration.

Some of these bills have lingered between Subcommittee and Full Committee for as many as nine months. This slow rate of legislative action is just one of the persistent issues that this Committee has faced in the 112th Congress. To date, the Committee has ordered reported to the House seven bills and one resolution. In fifteen months, just one Committee-reported bill has even been considered by the House.

I will forego a discussion on the bills that have been sitting on the Union Calendar for months or the DHS Authorization Act which we considered in October and has yet to be reported to the House. At the beginning of the 112th Congress, we all had high hopes for this Committee to be at the forefront of homeland security legislation in this Congress.

We all looked forward to you working with your leadership to grow our jurisdiction and create new important precedents on which future Chairmen could build. Regrettably, to date, those hopes have not been realized."

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