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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

***Taking Measure of Countermeasures (Part 3):
Protecting the Protectors***

April 17, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Taking Measure of Countermeasures (Part 3): Protecting the Protectors”:

“Adequately trained and equipped first responders are the foundation of our response plans. We cannot afford to miss opportunities to provide first responders the tools they need to protect the public.

For 26 years, I served as a volunteer firefighter. When we were called to action, we responded.

When first responders across this country are called to action, they know that inaction or delay can cost lives. They have to act.

DHS needs to adopt a first responder mindset. In 2008, the Homeland Security Council directed DHS to develop guidance on the appropriate measures for first responders to take following an anthrax attack. Draft guidance was released in 2009. The final guidance has yet to be issued.

Earlier this year, the Full Committee was scheduled to mark-up H.R. 2356, the “WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act of 2011.” That legislation, introduced by a former Member of this Committee, Congressman Pascrell, would have directed the Department of Health and Human Services to make surplus vaccines and countermeasures with a short shelf-life available to first responders.

The same legislation would have reauthorized the Metropolitan Medical Response System, which permits local governments to use grant funding to buy countermeasures to protect first responders and their families.

Unfortunately, the Majority cancelled mark up of this vital legislation. I hope that today’s hearing can be used to gain additional information on the importance of this legislation and help this committee move toward full committee consideration of H.R. 2356.”

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