



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Eleven Years Later: Preventing Terrorists from Coming to America

September 11, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Eleven Years Later: Preventing Terrorists from Coming to America”:

“Today, as we do each year on the anniversary of September 11, 2001, Americans pause to pay tribute to the men, women and children who died that fateful day. We remember the families who lost their loved ones, and honor the sacrifice of the brave first responders who answered the call in the face of the worst terrorist attacks in the history of our Nation.

Within this Committee, it is appropriate that we ensure we are continuing to do our part to address the vulnerabilities that allowed the 9/11 hijackers to commit their heinous attacks.

Over the last eleven years, the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State have made significant strides toward better securing the visa and passenger prescreening processes to prevent terrorist travel to the U.S.

However, the attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009 by an individual with a valid U.S. visa served as a wakeup call that more remained to be done.

DHS and the State Department have testified before this Committee about the security measures they have implemented since 2009 to prevent such an incident from recurring.

While I am pleased that we have taken these important steps, it is imperative that we stay one step ahead of those who might seek to do us harm.

It is not enough to be able to stop the last attack; we must be ready to stop the next one.

I hope to hear from our witnesses today that DHS and the State Department are taking proactive measures to address possible emerging terrorist travel threats.

I have long supported pushing our borders out and beginning the screening process far in advance of a traveler boarding a flight to this country.

Both DHS and the State Department have vital roles to play in this effort, and close coordination between the Departments is essential to success.

Their efforts also require appropriate personnel and resources, which, in turn, require adequate funding.

Members of Congress who claim to be strong on security need to put money where their mouths are to ensure that DHS and the State Department have the resources necessary to carry out this vital mission.

Just as we must ensure the security of the visa process for those entering the U.S., we must also ensure individuals depart this country in a timely manner.

Among the millions of individuals who are in this country illegally after overstaying their visas, perhaps a handful may wish to do America harm.

Yet eleven years after the terrorist attacks, DHS has not fulfilled a key 9/11 Commission recommendation to deploy a biometric entry-exit system under US-VISIT to track visitors to the U.S.

Without an entry-exit system, we cannot truly have visa security.

Also of concern is a recent DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) report highlighting problems with the US-VISIT database. I want to hear more today about the Inspector General's findings and what DHS is doing to address them.

Again, I join my colleagues in expressing my sincere condolences to the family members and friends of those who lost their lives eleven years ago today. You are in our prayers and those lost that day will never be forgotten. I thank the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>