



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

The Department of Homeland Security: An Assessment of the Department and a Roadmap for its Future

September 20, 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 “The Department of Homeland Security: An Assessment of the Department and a Roadmap for its Future”:

“In March 2003, the Federal Government stood up the Department of Homeland Security in response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks.

Today, the Department of Homeland Security is the third-largest agency in the Federal Government, employing about 220,000 people and operating both domestically and internationally.

Prior to September 2001, the United States used various approaches to handle catastrophes including national guard involvement, law enforcement and emergency management.

But the events of September 2001 forced us to begin a process aimed at the development of a cohesive homeland security policy.

Over the last ten years, the concept of homeland security has evolved and expanded.

While the need to address terrorism remains central to our understanding of homeland security, we now understand that homeland security must include other catastrophic incidents.

We must remain concerned about the risks that may threaten the lives of our people.

But we cannot fail to recognize those things that may threaten the strength of our democracy, the vitality of our economy as well as the continuation of public and private sector activities that impact our daily lives—from critical infrastructure protection to cybersecurity.

The evolution and expansion of our understanding of homeland security has required us to ask the Department about risk assessment, strategic development and operational priorities.

From my vantage point, the ability to come to grips with these questions of risk, strategy and operations has formed the core of the Department’s struggles as well as formed the basis for its successes.

So, as we begin a discussion of the Department’s roadmap to the future, we must acknowledge that its presence on GAO’s high risk list remains a continuing cause for concern.

The importance of the Department’s high risk designation and its ability to implement its plans to resolve the transformation and integration issues that continue to hamper its development into a cohesive organizational unit cannot be understated.

For several years, I have noted the need to strengthen the ability of the Undersecretary for

Management to require and enforce uniform administrative practices and procedures throughout each component.

It seems to me that the lack of power in the Management office will continue to permit ineffective and inconsistent practices in procurement and personnel throughout the components.

We see the results of these inconsistencies each time we learn about wasted money. And we read about the fallout of these inconsistent practices every year when the Department ends up near the bottom of the OPM's annual survey on employee satisfaction.

So as we consider the roadmap forward, let us be sure to consider how the Department can achieve the mission and improve its internal operations.

The biggest challenge, however, is whether Congress will fully fund homeland security efforts, as opposed to slashing the homeland security budget as proposed by the Majority.

While the threat to homeland security has not diminished, the Department of Homeland Security has been required to do more with less.

The Fiscal Year 2012 Homeland Security Appropriations shortchanged homeland security – from border security, aviation security, science and technology, and in particular the Management Directorate.

And the budget environment for Fiscal Year 2013 has not changed, in fact, it may have worsened.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on these and other issues as we discuss the path forward for this Department.”

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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>