

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****A Line in the Sand: Assessing Dangerous Threats to our Nation's Borders***

November 16, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Oversight, Investigations, and Management subcommittee hearing entitled “A Line in the Sand: Assessing Dangerous Threats to our Nation’s Borders”:

“Each Member who sits on this side of the dais is committed to border security and will take every step within our power to protect our border and keep dangerous goods, weapons and people out of the United States.

While the Majority has gone to great lengths to draft and release its “A Line in the Sand” report, it is worth noting that there was no attempt to include the views of Democratic Members.

Yet, homeland security funds are scarce. We must ensure that resources are allocated based on known risks. Contrary to the assertions contained in the report, the threats from both terrorism and spillover violence on the Southwest border are extremely low. However, these threats should not be overstated and given more credence than the evidence and statistics warrant.

Having said that, I am looking forward to hearing ideas and policy suggestions on how we can move forward in assessing border threats and ensuring that the border remains safe and in the face of budget constraints.

Fortunately, the Border Patrol is better staffed today than at any time during its 88-year history. Along the Southwest border, the Department of Homeland Security has increased the number of Border Patrol agents from approximately 9,100 in 2001 to more than 18,500 today. Moreover, the U.S. Border Patrol has implemented a new plan the Border Patrol Strategic Plan: 2012-2016 to guide the agency over the next four years.

Furthermore, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) now screens 100 percent of southbound rail shipments for illegal weapons, drugs, and cash, has expanded Unmanned Aircraft System coverage to the entire Southwest border and completed 651 miles of fencing.

These changes and enhancements have produced real results.

Illegal immigration attempts, as measured by Border Patrol apprehensions, have decreased 53 percent in the past three years, and are less than one third of what they were at their peak.

And, over the past three years, the Department has seized 74 percent more currency, 41 percent more drugs, and 159 percent more weapons along the Southwest border as compared to Fiscal Years 2006-2008.

More than 250 Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Special Agents, investigators, and intelligence analysts are working around the clock to secure our border.

Their presence deters violent actors from crossing into our border communities, which are among the safest places to live in the United States.

Like others, I am troubled by the violence that is occurring on the Mexico side of the border.

That is why I support the Merida Initiative and other Federal strategies that seek to help our neighbor to

the South address the violence.

But, claims that this violence has spread into the United States are not grounded in fact.

Fortunately, the combined efforts of our Federal government, working alongside State and local law enforcement, have prevented widespread spillover violence.

These results do not negate the violence that is occurring in Mexico; however, they do indicate that current U.S. strategies are improving the safety and security of the United States.

Moreover, as we examine the threats to our Nation's borders, we must not forget that our security challenges are not limited to the southwest.

Our northern and maritime borders are sometimes forgotten, perhaps because politics often trumps policy in these discussions.

These borders are vast, often remote, relatively unguarded areas that provide opportunities for illicit activity and it is on this border where the greater potential for terrorists to enter our country exists.

I look forward to hearing the witnesses' ideas on how best to confront these challenges."

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