



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

What Does a Secure Border Look Like?

February 26, 2013 (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 “What Does a Secure Border Look Like?”:

“With the support of Congress, DHS has made unprecedented efforts to better secure our borders in recent years, as outlined by Ranking Member Jackson Lee in her opening statement.

Reasonable people may disagree about the best way to proceed from here, or about what having a “secure border” means.

Some may believe we need expensive new technology systems along our borders.

Others, including me, see the need for additional effective, targeted resources accompanied by a comprehensive border security strategy that ensures we are using taxpayers' border security dollars wisely and avoiding past acquisitions failures.

Some may believe we need to return to using “operational control” as our metric for measuring border security.

Others, including me, believe we need a workable metric or set of metrics that offer an accurate assessment of security of all of our Nation's borders, both at and between the ports of entry.

Earlier this month, former Coast Guard Commandant Thad Allen testified at the request of Chairman McCaul and urged the Committee to decide what is an acceptable level of risk at our borders, while accepting that the risk will never be zero.

I agree with former Commandant Allen and would like to insert his statement from the Full Committee hearing into today's hearing record.

Regardless of these differences, I would hope we can all agree that pulling the equivalent of 5,000 Border Patrol agents and 2,750 CBP officers from our borders, as called for by the sequester, is no way to achieve anyone's definition of a “secure border.”

Forcing the Coast Guard to curtail air and surface operations by more than 25 percent, reducing essential missions including migrant and drug interdiction and port security operations, is no way to achieve secure borders.

Additionally, reducing the number of available immigration detention beds from the 34,000 we have today is no way to secure our borders.

I hope we can have a frank discussion today about the challenges DHS will face in securing our borders if and when sequestration takes effect.

I am also pleased that we are joined today by a witness from the Government Accountability Office.

GAO has done some very important work on border security matters on behalf of this Committee.

This work includes a report being released today that examines crime rates on the U.S. side of the southwest border.

The report shows that, in general, crime rates have fallen in border communities in recent years and, in fact, are mostly lower than crime rates in non-border communities within the same states.

This data would appear to suggest that while border-related crime is a concern, border communities are largely safe places to live, work, and do business.

I hope to hear from Ms. Gambler in more detail about the report and what GAO's body of work indicates about the state of security along our borders.

Finally, as ground work is being done to develop comprehensive immigration reform legislation, I want to remind all of our Members that border security is inextricably linked to immigration matters and will be an integral part of any reform proposal.

As the leading committee on border security in the House, the Committee on Homeland Security has a long and successful history of conducting oversight of the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to secure our nation's borders.

It is imperative that this committee's expertise on border security inform any legislative proposals produced by Congress to reform our immigration system."

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