

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

The Boston Bombings: A First Look

May 9, 2013 (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 Boston Bombings: A First Look”:

“This hearing has been billed as a first look at the Boston Marathon bombing. While it is appropriate that we examine the events of April 15th, we need to understand and recognize our limitations.

First, we must recognize that the events of that day remain under investigation. While we must fulfill our oversight responsibilities under the Constitution, we must be careful not to jeopardize an on-going criminal investigation. So we must exercise some discretion in our questioning and our statements about these events, the suspects and theories about links to others who may not be in custody.

Despite those limitations, there is much we can discuss regarding the Boston Marathon bombing. We can and should discuss the incredible response from the police, fire fighters and emergency medical personnel. Once again, the first responder community ran toward a catastrophic situation when all others were running away. So, I want to commend the Boston first responders for their bravery and heroic actions. But I also must recognize that as first responders, they demonstrate that kind of bravery every day.

Second, we need to acknowledge the people of Boston and the surrounding area. They not only responded with calm and determination on that day, but in the days that followed, they responded to law enforcement’s call for help by sharing their photographs and videos. That kind of community spirit - the willingness to pull together and lend a hand - is one of the qualities that make this country a great place.

Additionally, we must recognize the thoughtful and difficult decision by the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Requiring residents to remain in their homes for a few days after the bombing and placing an entire city on “lockdown” was not easy. But given that the exact nature of the threat was unknown, it was a decision which had to be made.

And finally, we must acknowledge the decision of the Attorney General to immediately refer to the bombing as an act of terror and send the FBI and other Federal law enforcement to assist in the effort to locate, arrest, and bring to justice those responsible.

As we look at the events of April 15th and the days that followed, we must also look at what happened before April 15th.

As the Committee on Homeland Security, we must acknowledge that the kind of response that occurred on that day would not have been possible without Federal grant funds. The effectiveness of the response executed by the first responders is a direct result of over a decade of investment in preparedness and response capabilities and exercises supported by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its targeted homeland security grants. Since 2002, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Boston Urban Area have received over \$1.3 billion in funding through Federal grant programs.

The Commonwealth and the Boston Urban Area have used these funds to develop capabilities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate the effect of, respond to, and recover from natural disasters and terrorist attacks like the Boston Marathon Bombings. Anyone who has doubts about the value of Federal grant dollars should be reminded of the brave actions of the first responders on April 15th.

So, as this Congress continues to cut funding for these programs, I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are Members of this Committee will oppose those cuts. Refusal to support these funding cuts would be the greatest tribute any of us could make to the people of Boston.

But I also recognize that in addition to the positive effects of Federal grant funding, the Boston bombing also revealed some negatives that we cannot ignore.

We cannot ignore that once again, it has taken a tragedy to reveal problems in our vast, varied and numerous Federal databases. We faced a similar problem of a faulty database in the Christmas Day bomber incident. Now we learn that there were database problems which made it possible for one of the bombing suspects to re-enter the country after a trip to Russia.

It is time to recognize that we must develop a way to fix and integrate these various databases. But we must also realize that in the Federal government, no one agency or entity has the responsibility and the authority to scrub and integrate these vast systems that contain records on millions of people. Congress cannot continue to complain about the failure of the databases without giving the authority and the funding to one agency to fix these problems.

I guarantee you that if we fail to act, we will be discussing this issue again.

But that is not the only issue we must act upon. In response to the events of September 11th, Congress enacted the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act of 2002. That measure increased the availability of terrorism risk insurance to at-risk American businesses by guaranteeing that the government would share some of the losses with private insurers should a terrorist attack occur. That act is set to sunset in 2014. Today, I am introducing a bill that would not only extend the act, but would add some needed improvements.

I urge my colleagues on this Committee to co-sponsor this act. We must recognize that small businesses and others that suffer an economic loss due to a terrorist act should not have to shoulder that burden alone and should not have to rely on the kindness of charity.

Finally, as we take this first look at the Boston bombings, I hope we do not fall into a pattern of reaching conclusions before all the facts are known. At this point in the investigation, speculation about the motivations of the suspects and the role of external influences seems to change daily.

We all want to know the answers and are tempted to reach our own conclusions. But somewhere I read—to everything there is a time and season. This is not the time and the season has not yet come. But it will arrive shortly. So, I look forward to our second look, where we can receive testimony from representatives of the intelligence and investigative agencies that may serve to answer many of our questions about motivations, the suspects and external influences.”

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