

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****“The Insider Threat to Homeland Security: An Examination of the Security Clearance Process”***

November 13, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for Counterterrorism and Intelligence subcommittee hearing entitled “The Insider Threat to Homeland Security: An Examination of the Security Clearance Process”:

“My years in leadership on this Committee have given me great insight into the American public’s evolving interest in homeland security. Matters such as aviation security and emergency preparedness usually remain at the forefront of the minds of vast majority of Americans, while employment matters may usually strike those who are affected. After September 11th, the public wanted to know what could be done to make sure that another devastating attack did not take place.

The public also wanted to know how they could help this country through either military or civilian service. As the government began to develop solutions, the Department of Homeland Security was established to secure the nation from the many threats it faces. Other executive orders increased the government’s ability to track Americans who engaged with people overseas.

A sweeping change came to the federal workforce. The 9/11 Commissioners recommended that the United States improve its intelligence gathering and information sharing activities. More and more civilians began to be employed in positions that allowed access to classified information that required them to have security clearances.

Ten years after September 11th, the sheer volume of Americans holding security clearances was astonishing. According to the Government Accountability Office, in 2011, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the nation’s executive security agent, reported that over 4.9 million federal contractors and government workers held or were eligible to hold a security clearance. Many people contact Congress and inquire about the clearance process. For some, successful completion of the clearance process is a badge of honor. For others, due to various circumstances, obtaining a clearance was a hurdle to employment. Some questioned why clearances were necessary to perform certain duties that may not involve access to classified material.

Some longtime federal employees were concerned that they might be required to redo the process when they switch employment at different agencies within the federal government. The volume of security clearances gave me pause. Last summer, I asked the Government Accountability Office to conduct an investigation into security clearances. GAO found that throughout the federal government that there are essentially no agreed-upon standards for requiring security clearances for federal jobs.

The lack of clear criteria and commonly accepted standards may contribute to the exponential growth in federal jobs requiring a security clearance. GAO also found that security clearance requirements for federal jobs that do not involve handling national security information may hinder transparency and openness in government. The security clearance issue was at the forefront of my mind and the minds of employment seekers the past few years; however, May

2013 changed the game.

An overwhelming number of Americans became concerned when former NSA contractor Edward Snowden leaked the details of classified programs to the British newspaper The Guardian. Snowden's security clearance was vetted by an outside contractor and, in hindsight, many still wonder if Snowden should have had access to such sensitive information. There are several reports that Snowden may have omitted or embellished information on his personnel background form.

The same firm that vetted outside contractor Edward Snowden vetted Navy Yard shooter Aaron Alexis. On September 16, Alexis, a civilian contractor, opened fire at Navy Yard here in Washington, DC. After the Navy Yard shooting, it was discovered that Alexis failed to disclose information about felony charges, and a federal personnel report had no information about a his previous arrests.

It is difficult to believe that the executive branch spends over \$1 billion dollars on background investigations for suitability and security clearances, but could not yield Alexis's felony gun charges. Despite GAO's insistence, it took leaks and a horrific lone gunman to get an executive branch review. I look forward to the panel's review and remind them that access to national security information is a privilege that should be regarded with the highest integrity.

There needs to be uniformity with how security clearances are given and in how they are revoked. If revocation or suspension is the rule for leaking information, it needs to be applied across the board."

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