

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Ranking Member Thompson Statement*****The President's FY2015 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security***

March 13, 2014 (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 President’s FY2015 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security:

“Welcome back, Mr. Secretary. It is good to see you again. When we last met, you testified to your vision and priorities as the new Secretary of Homeland Security. The budget request under discussion today should provide greater clarity about your vision and priorities.

The budget request that the President submitted on your behalf is not simply a collection of numbers and tables, it is an expression of your values and aspirations. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that this proposal was developed in less than optimal conditions. The Budget Control Act—which forced sequestration cuts—has not only limited DHS’ baseline funding but may also cause DHS’ operations to be limited.

The Comptroller General reports that DHS took certain administrative actions, including hiring freezes and employment award freezes, to help soften the blow of the funding reductions. Even with those actions and the reallocation of carryover funding, sequestration took a toll on DHS’ operations, particularly at the Coast Guard and ICE. It also resulted in reductions of support for terrorism detection, preparedness, and response on the local level.

GAO found that the Coast Guard’s interdictions of migrants and drugs at sea were down by 29 percent and 24 percent, respectively. There were also about 6,000 fewer vessel inspections. At ICE, training and other core activities were reduced to cover the costs of maintaining 34,000 detention beds, as mandated in law. There were also significant reductions to the Port Security Grant Program and The Intercity Passenger Rail Program.

The Budget before us today would inflict deeper cuts to State and local grant programs. Unless the President’s proposal to close tax loopholes and institute new fees is accepted, there will be a \$300 million reduction in assistance to State and local governments to enhance cyber capabilities and for University Programs.

Department officials expressed concern to GAO about its ability to “mitigate future potential budget cuts” and about “how effectively the workforce will be able to respond to future mission critical needs.” While I appreciate that the Budget addresses a number of key priorities at the Department, including border security resources and recapitalization of the Coast Guard, I am concerned about certain proposals.

Particularly, I look forward to hearing more about the fee-increase proposal in TSA’s budget. It is rather surprising, given that an increase to the fee was just authorized in December. Other areas that warrant discussion include the Department’s proposal to consolidate State and local preparedness grants and reduce University programs. These kinds of programs are essential to building homeland security throughout the Nation.”

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