

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****The Boston Marathon Bombings, One Year On: A Look Back to Look Forward***

April 9, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) submitted the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The Boston Marathon Bombings, One Year On: A Look Back to Look Forward”:

“I want to extend condolences to the families of the four people killed during last week’s shooting at Ft. Hood. Additionally, prayers are with the sixteen people who were injured during the shooting. I want to recognize the first responder community and medical personnel for their incredible response to the shooting. As of today, the Joint Terrorism Task Force does not consider the shooting an act of terrorism. However, the investigation is still ongoing.

Incidents like last week’s shooting and last year’s Boston Marathon Bombing—the focus of today’s hearing—remind us of the importance of first responders. With that being said, I again commend the service of our witnesses: former Commissioner Davis, Chief Devaru, and Sergeant Pugliese. I also thank Professor Leonard for recognizing their courageous efforts in his research.

Resilience and response are two of the reasons why almost a year later the Boston metropolitan area remains strong. Hence, I wish Mayor Walsh, President of the Boston Athletic Association, Joann Flamino, and all the runners and volunteers participating in the 118th Boston Marathon well as the race commences on April 21.

Even though Boston is standing strong, it would be a disservice to the community not to take a look back. There are still unanswered questions about the history of Tsarnaev brothers—the alleged Boston Marathon Bombers. We owe it to the people of Boston and the rest of America to make sure that the appropriate officials do a thorough review of the situation.

Last April, the Inspectors General of the Intelligence Community, Departments of Homeland Security and Justice and the Central Intelligence Agency announced a joint investigation into whether intelligence was properly distributed and acted upon in the months and years before the bombings at the Boston Marathon. I find it rather unfortunate; however, that the review was delayed because of the senseless sixteen-day government shut down in October 2013. Partisan disagreements create serious gaps in homeland security oversight and this is just one example of the myriad of setbacks the shut down yielded.

Another development since last year is Attorney General Holder’s January 30th announcement that the United States would be seeking the death penalty against Dzhokar Tsarnaev, the alleged Boston Marathon Bomber. Since Dzhokar Tsarnaev was arrested and indicted, I have declared my confidence in his receiving a fair, yet aggressive prosecution in the United States District Court for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Mr. Chairman, as a former federal prosecutor, you know Attorney General Holder’s decision to seek the death penalty against Tsarnaev was a game changer. I am sure you are familiar with the intricacies involved in a capital case. As I reminded the Committee last year, as we fulfill our Constitutional oversight responsibilities, we must be careful not to jeopardize a federal prosecution—this applies to both the words we speak to the public as well as the publications that stem from our research.

Unfortunately, some of the actions that have extended from by this Committee have not been helpful to the Department of Justice. On March 26, a Majority Staff Report endorsed by a minority of

Members of this Committee was released to the public. Less than 48 hours after the report's release, Dzhokar Tsarnaev's defense team filed a motion in the United States District Court citing this report. I reemphasize that as Members of Congress, especially Members of the Homeland Security Committee, we are held to a heightened standard. We are trusted to have both classified and unclassified briefings and meetings with the members of Intelligence Community.

Therefore, the words we speak or publish about an alleged terrorist transcend the halls of Congress and are not taken lightly by the public. Furthermore, this not only applies to events surrounding Boston but also to other events with pending investigation. Reaching conclusions before facts are known puts the reputation of this Committee in peril. Thus, we must exercise discretion in our questioning and our statements about events, suspects, and the links to others that may not be in custody.

In spite of these limitations, Mr. Chairman, we can still use our platform to have a productive discussion about the Boston Marathon bombing and act on outstanding matters. For instance, we can and should discuss the funding given to the first responder community.

Last year, at the Committee on Homeland Security's first hearing on the Boston Marathon Bombings, former Commissioner Davis stated that without grant funding, the "response would have been much less comprehensive than it was" and without the exercises supported through Urban Area Security Initiative funding, "there would be more people who had died in these attacks." Professor Leonard's testimony also indicates that this type of preparedness is what made the first response effective. Sergeant Pugliese is also testifying today that local municipal governments are not financially equipped to take on the increasing burden of catastrophic attacks like Boston. It is time that we not only listen to the first responders but also take action.

Not only after last year's hearing, but also hearings throughout several Congresses, Members have heard about the importance of these grant programs and success stories involving them. Accordingly, I urge Members to oppose the Administration's proposal to shift focus away from supporting State and local efforts to develop terrorism-related prevention and preparedness capabilities by morphing the Homeland Security Grant Program into an all hazards grant. I am not convinced that the Administration's underfunded grant consolidation proposal would provide sufficient support for first responders across America to build and maintain the capabilities necessary to respond as effectively as the first responders in Boston and Watertown did after the bombings last year. I cannot support any grant reform proposal until I am convinced that it would provide support necessary to maintain the terrorism-preparedness capabilities we have spent over a decade building.

Also, I agree with the Chairman that we cannot ignore that information sharing between federal, state, and local authorities needs strengthening. Since September 11th, information sharing silos that the 9/11 Commissioners recommended be addressed continue to be exposed after tragic events. We need to work together to develop ways to fix this problem post haste.

We must also consider the economic costs of terrorism. In response to the events of September 11, 2001, 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 this year. According to the RAND corporation, allowing this Act to expire would harm national security. Last year, I introduced a bill that would extend the act and add some needed improvements. I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this legislation.

Even though it has been almost a year since the bombings, there have been some game-changing moments, and some ships are still anchored. As we continue to seek answers, I remind us to be responsible and act within our Constitutional boundaries. The people of Boston are looking for our leadership on this issue."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978