

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Open Borders: The Impact of Presidential Amnesty on Border Security***

December 2, 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 “Open Borders: The Impact of Presidential Amnesty on Border Security”:

“Since 1956, Presidents have granted temporary immigration relief to impacted individuals on 39 separate occasions; therefore, it would seem that changes outlined by President Obama on November 20 are not outside the bounds of Presidential authority, as provided under our Constitution.

Approximately 11 million undocumented individuals are forced to hide in the shadows even as they live and work in plain sight in communities big and small across our nation. Time and again, the House Republican Leadership has been unwilling to act to fix our broken immigration system. In the face of this crisis and the absence of Congressional action, the President acted in a measured way that is likely to improve both our Nation’s security and economy.

Specifically, the President announced an establishment of the Deferred Action for Parental Accountability Program—which delays deportation for immigrants who have lived illegally in the U.S. for more than five years but have children who are citizens or have green cards.

Contrary to messaging from those who disagree with the President and many of his policies unrelated to immigration, this deferred action does not provide relief to recent border crossers. If the applicant can pass a criminal background check and pay a fee, he or she could qualify for a work permit and avoid deportation for three years at a time.

Approximately 4 million immigrants are expected to qualify for this temporary relief. This approach—to provide deferred enforcement in order to keep families intact in light of Congressional failure to provide such relief—is not novel. The “Family Fairness” program implemented by President Reagan and expanded by President George H.W. Bush provided deferred enforcement for close family members of individuals legalized by the Immigration Reform and Control Act. President Obama’s directive rightly prioritizes the removal of undocumented individuals who have committed serious crimes, thus enhancing the safety of our communities.

I am troubled by the extreme criticism and disdain that this temporary and limited set of actions has received by some in Congress. The concept of families with working parents and children who attend school is consistent with values we all hold. Now, with the President’s announcement this value or fabric of America is now being called renegade and a basis for more illegal action.

A fair criticism may be that vulnerable people in violence-ridden communities in Central America will be misled by enterprising “Coyotes” and smugglers about the scope of individuals covered by the President’s actions. I look forward to hearing from Secretary Johnson about planning efforts that are being rolled out in anticipation of such misinformation. We all know

that recent border crossers would not be covered.

Even if there is an upsurge based on such misinformation, Congress has made significant investments in personnel and equipment at the southern border that should ensure that DHS is able to effectively respond to any increases in attempted border crossings.

Let me be clear, the President's executive actions are a good start. However, there are still many people whom I believe deserve such consideration but are being left out. Specifically, I would point to agricultural workers.

The President's executive action does not provide specific relief to an estimated quarter million of these workers that might be eligible for some type of deferred action. More remains to be done to address the labor needs of America's farmers. Where the executive action remains silent, there is an opportunity for Congress to legislate.

Let me close with two thoughts. To those who have said that the President's actions do not represent the will of the American people, I say, you need to listen better. Americans, by wide margins, believe our immigration system can be fixed in a fair and humane way that does not jeopardize our security.

Second, to those in Congress who have embraced the idea of putting the Department of Homeland Security in budgetary limbo while every other Federal agency is funded for Fiscal Year 2015, I say 'you should really think about the message that sends about Congress' commitment to homeland security.'

In closing, it is my hope that Congress will use this action as a starting point to legislate permanent fixes to our Nation's immigration system and further improve our border security. Mr. Chairman, I am willing to work with you throughout the remainder of this Congress and next Congress to make these legislative changes happen."

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