

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Committee Organizational Meeting***

January 21, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee organizational meeting for the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress:

“Our actions today will set the tone for the 114th Congress. I am proud of the record of bipartisan cooperation that this Committee has developed over the years.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, there are a couple of dark clouds looming that threaten bipartisan cooperation. First, of course, is the scheduled mark-up of your border bill later today. As I have told you, I came into this Congress eager to continue our bipartisan efforts at border security and build on our success with H.R. 1417.

I am troubled that instead of embracing my good faith offer of partnership, you introduced a 72-page, wide-ranging bill with no input from Democrats. To make matters worse, on Friday, you decided to schedule a markup of that bill today, which, before last week, had never been seen.

I am certain you were aware that scheduling a mark-up for today would result in Members - on both sides of the aisle - having very little time to review the measure, let alone prepare amendments. Monday was a Federal holiday - the observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, and last night, the President delivered the State of the Union Address.

Further, scheduling a mark-up at the Full Committee undercuts the Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee, which is just being constituted today with a new leader on our side of the aisle - a gentleman with significant knowledge of the challenges along the Southwest border - the gentleman from Texas, Representative Filemon Vela.

The second dark cloud is of course the change that you have included in the Committee Rules package with respect to subpoena authority. I am troubled that your staff never mentioned your desire to have unilateral authority to issue subpoenas during the month-long bipartisan negotiations on the Rules package.

Historically, changes to our Committee Rules are bipartisan and reflect the lessons learned from the previous Congress. Generally, we come together to refine the Rules in those places where there has been confusion or where obstacles have been encountered. Not once in the 113th Congress did you pursue the issuance of a subpoena so this Rules change seems to be out of left field.

A charitable view of it would be that it is a solution looking for a problem. A less charitable view would be that it is a power grab by a Chairman with a significantly larger Majority. As any observer of this Committee can tell you, despite our jurisdictional limitations, we are most effective when we put politics aside and act in a unified bipartisan manner.

Look at what we accomplished together in the last Congress on cybersecurity, aviation security, and chemical security. Regrettably, the subpoena Rule change signals a “go it alone” mindset. That is unfortunate.

There is too much we need to do together to address what Americans say is their biggest concern—terrorism. Just last week, the Pew Research Center reported that for the first time in five years, Americans have put “defending the country from terrorism” at the top of their priority list. Given that the threats posed by homegrown violent extremists and the diverse nature of the terrorist plots and incidents that recently occurred in Europe, Australia, Canada, and Nigeria, this is not surprising.

In recognition of the diverse threat environment, Secretary Johnson has directed the Department to increase its security, screening, and protection efforts, particularly at Federal buildings, airports, and other possible targets. Congress needs to do more, too and provide funding to DHS for the full fiscal year without strings. As for this Committee, we should come together to provide the oversight that DHS needs to fulfill its missions.

To that end, I am pleased that the Committee will have the benefit of an impressive slate of Members from across the country for the Democratic roster this Congress. I would like to spotlight our four new Members—one who is returning to the Committee and three who are new to the Congress. They are Jim Langevin of Rhode Island, Norma Torres of California, Bonnie Watson Coleman of New Jersey, who will bring her significant oversight experience from her time in the New Jersey General Assembly to the work of the Oversight and Management Efficiency Subcommittee, and Kathleen Rice of New York, who has agreed to take on the critical challenge of securing our air, rail, and mass transit transportation systems as the Ranking Member on the Transportation Security Subcommittee.

With respect to the remaining three Subcommittees, Brian Higgins of New York has agreed to continue as Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Cedric Richmond of Louisiana has agreed to take on a new role on the Committee and lead the Democrats on the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection and Security Technologies, and Donald Payne, Jr. of New Jersey will continue to provide a steady hand at the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications.

The depth of experience and diversity in backgrounds that our Members bring to the table will most certainly enhance the effectiveness of the Committee. With that, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all the returning and new Members of the Committee.”

# # #

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

**United States House of Representatives**  
Committee on Homeland Security  
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515  
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499  
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>