

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****“Examining DHS’s Misplaced Focus on Climate Change”***

July 8, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency hearing entitled “Examining DHS’s Misplaced Focus on Climate Change”:

“Today’s hearing title mischaracterizes the Department of Homeland Security’s programs that address security risks linked to climate change as climate politics and a misplaced focus. These Department programs and activities provide resources to address other national priorities, such as preparedness for and responses to natural disasters.

After living through the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast—not to mention recent flooding in Texas and Oklahoma - I find it confusing that the Majority would see a “misplaced focus” in DHS efforts on hazard mapping and risk analysis to support the National Flood Insurance Program, producing physical measures to avoid or reduce damage associated with natural disasters; Assessing the safety and security of critical infrastructure; and conducting workshops requested by state, local, and tribal leaders, intended to build their preparation and response capacities.

In addition to the relevance of the Department’s core disaster preparation and mitigation efforts as a response to climate-change trends, an even-handed treatment of DHS responses to climate change would also acknowledge assessments produced by and for the U.S. Intelligence Community over the past decade. These studies have provided ample evidence that trends in global climate act as what the 2014 Quadrennial Homeland Security Review describes as “threat multipliers... aggravat[ing] stressors abroad that can enable terrorist activity and violence, such as poverty, environmental degradation, and social tensions.”

For example, as the U.S. Institute of Peace has found that the threats we face today from the extremist group Boko Haram first emerged and expanded during a period coinciding with major droughts in and around Northern Nigeria. Two months ago, the Chairman of this Committee stated that the Obama Administration, particularly the Department of Homeland Security, is placing more emphasis on climate change than on countering violent extremism.

Despite the Chairman’s unwarranted criticism of DHS valuable initiatives related to climate change, I, too, have concerns about the Department of Homeland Security’s approach to countering violent extremism. I have asked the Chairman to hold hearings on the Department’s approach to countering violent extremism and to receive testimony from the DHS countering violent extremism coordinator. I have also expressed the need to receive testimony on this topic to the Department of Homeland Security. However, rather than provide testimony, the Department has chosen to have a briefing in our Committee’s classified space.

Unfortunately, to date, this Committee has not received testimony, in an open setting, from the Department on what it is doing in that space. Consequently, the Department has not adequately afforded the members of the Committee with the opportunity to hear what it is doing on Countering Violent Extremism. With the surge in domestic terrorist activity, such as what was carried out in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17 and the continuing threat from international terrorist groups such as ISIL, it is important and well past time this Committee receives testimony from DHS, not outside entities, on CVE.

The Department can and must manage in ways that develop robust, versatile, and adaptable activities and capabilities to address the full spectrum of threats - from both man-made and natural disasters - to the American people and homeland.

In doing so, DHS leaders work to find ways for the Department to make the fullest contribution to the whole-of-government response to climate-change phenomena, employing programs and systems also used to respond to drug trafficking, threats to transportation, and threats to infrastructure generally. Similarly, we can find ways to counter violent extremism that robs Americans' lives, whether originating at home or abroad, sharpening the same kind of smart and flexible management.”

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