

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Securing the Maritime Border: The Future of CBP Air and Marine***

July 14, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Securing the Maritime Border: The Future of CBP Air and Marine”:

“In order to fulfill its mission, Office of Air and Marine (OAM) uses its integrated air and marine force to detect and interdict the unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs, and other contraband moving toward or crossing the borders of the United States. As Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security, I am aware of the varied border security surveillance and interdiction operations OAM carries out both on the water and in the air.

OAM’s authorities also allow it to provide specialized air and marine support to various federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, such as assisting FEMA in response to natural disasters. Unfortunately, various reviews conducted by DHS’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have raised concerns about certain OAM programs.

In response, the OIG and GAO have made a number of recommendations over the past several years to ensure OAM’s assets and personnel are best positioned to effectively meet mission needs and address border security threats. For instance, in December 2014, the OIG published a report on CBP’s unmanned aircraft system (UAS) or “drone” program.

The report concluded that despite spending eight years and hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on its UAS program, CBP cannot prove the program is effective and that its impact in stemming illegal immigration has been minimal.

The report also concluded there are serious questions about whether the program has led to a greater number of apprehensions, reduced border surveillance costs, or increased efficiency by the U.S. Border Patrol along our southwest border.

The Inspector General summarized their findings saying, “Notwithstanding the significant investment, we see no evidence that the drones contribute to a more secure border, and there is no reason to invest additional taxpayer funds at this time.” Among the OIG’s recommendations was for OAM to establish attainable performance measures to determine the effectiveness of the UAS program at enhancing border security.

Additionally, the OIG recommended the development of “policies and procedures to ensure that [the Office of Air and Marine] accumulates and reports all costs associated with the UAS program and other OAM flight programs.” I know OAM vehemently disagrees with the OIG report, and I am aware that Members of this Committee have asked the GAO to look at many of the same issues. Today, I would like to hear about what steps OAM has taken, if any, to respond to the OIG’s recommendations, given the UAS program’s significant cost and its purported benefits to border security.

Lastly, I am concerned about use of force issues within CBP generally, and would like to hear today about how these issues are handled within OAM in particular. I am aware that the CBP Commissioner has begun implementing new policies and procedures regarding use of force

incidents.

Given that in the past few months OAM has been involved in two fatal use of force incidents – one off the California coast and another near the British Virgin Islands – I would like to know more about OAM's use of force protocols and whether they are being modified as a result of the Commissioner's recent initiatives. Finally, I hope to hear about what this Committee can do to assist the Office of Air and Marine in meeting its mission as effectively and efficiently as possible.”

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