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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

**A Dangerous and Sophisticated Adversary: The Threat to the
Homeland Posed by Cartel Operations**

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

February 16, 2017

Today, the matter before the Subcommittee is one where I expect there to be a great deal of bipartisan agreement. Drug cartels seek to exploit our borders to smuggle narcotics into the United States and bulk cash and weapons out of this country.

The Department of Homeland Security and its Federal partners are charged with combatting the cartels and securing America's borders, ports, and waterways from their contraband.

This is no easy task, to be sure. The cartels are sophisticated operations with thousands of members, the best technology, and almost limitless resources to spend on their illicit activities.

That is why we need to use our border security resources wisely. Why waste billions on walls that we know cartels are already defeating by sending their drugs over, under or through, or by concealing in conveyances at ports of entry?

Instead, we need to dedicate funding to the personnel, technology, and assets that will help DHS interdict illicit drugs and identify, disrupt, and dismantle the organizations responsible for bringing drugs into our country.

For example, Customs and Border Protection is thousands of officers and agents short of what the agency's own staffing models say is necessary to carry out its operations. Simply saying you are going to hire more agents pays lip service to the problem, but does nothing to address the underlying issues that have prevented CBP from recruiting, hiring, and retaining personnel.

Also, Coast Guard's air and maritime assets are woefully outdated and in dire need of recapitalization. Even so, through the dedication and hard work of its men and women, the Coast Guard is credited with seizing tons of cocaine in the source and transit zones each year.

Imagine what they could do with the right kind of modern assets and the proper number of personnel to carry out the drug interdiction mission that Congress has charged them with.

These are the kinds of things we, as a country, need to invest in if we want to be serious about combatting the cartels and achieving meaningful border security.

Real border security does not come from vaguely worded, politically charged Executive Orders or fancy signing ceremonies, but rather by providing the right personnel and tools to get the job done. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how we can do just that.

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