

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Oversight of Federal Efforts to Address Electromagnetic Risks***

May 17, 2016 (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 “Oversight of Federal Efforts to Address Electromagnetic Risks”:

“An electromagnetic pulse or EMP is a burst of electromagnetic radiation created when a nuclear weapon is detonated or when a non-nuclear EMP weapon is used. Additionally, naturally-occurring solar weather can generate effects similar to other EMP events.

An EMP could cause catastrophic damage to our nation’s critical infrastructure. An EMP is a high impact, low probability risk. Over the past ten years, 92 percent of counties have had at least one Presidential disaster declaration issued; however, none of them were for an EMP.

This does not mean that we should be dismissive of the threat; however, we have the responsibility to examine the federal government’s efforts, while making sure that we do not use our platforms to promote fear in the minds of the American public.

As the lead agency coordinating the federal government’s efforts to promote the security and resiliency of the nation’s critical infrastructure, the Department of Homeland Security must take this threat, and all threats to the nation’s critical infrastructure, seriously.

Last month, the Government Accountability Office issued a report detailing the Department’s work in the EMP space and determined that DHS has not fully identified its risk assessments when it comes to an EMP attack.

GAO also found that DHS officials could not identify any DHS representatives or offices as having broader designated responsibility for performing key oversight or coordination roles regarding electromagnetic risks within DHS’s overall infrastructure protection efforts. According to GAO, stakeholders are unclear who within DHS is responsible for addressing electromagnetic risks.

This leaves me to ask an age old question that I have asked the Department on several occasions with regard to various responsibilities across several components—“Who’s in Charge?” While the Department of Homeland Security is two years into its “Unity of Effort” initiative, GAO’s findings, while not shocking, are concerning.

This is also troubling because as part of the Department’s effort to become more unified, the National Protection and Programs Directorate is looking to Congress for authorization for a reorganization. This reorganization includes having an infrastructure directorate that works with the public and private sectors on threats to physical and cyber infrastructure.

Congressional leaders need to know what if any impact a NPPD reorganization would have on the Department’s responsibilities with oversight of the threat from EMP and where EMP fits in the Department’s overall infrastructure protection strategy. We also need to know how the infrastructure directorate would plan on working with federal, state, and local stakeholders when it comes to infrastructure security.

I look forward to the testimony from today's witnesses that can provide greater context to how the government, in particular DHS, is dealing with the threat from EMP, including how DHS will address risk assessments and continue to work with outside stakeholders.

Finally, I am pleased that the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee has taken the initiative to introduce legislation that addresses the importance of risk assessments, and I look forward to cosponsoring her legislation.”

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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>