

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****An Examination of the Maritime Nuclear Smuggling Threat***

July 7, 2016 (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 joint hearing entitled “An Examination of the Maritime Nuclear Smuggling Threat”:

“Approximately 11 million cargo containers are unloaded from ships annually at U.S. seaports, providing many opportunities for terrorists to smuggle a nuclear bomb or weapon of mass destruction onto our Nation’s shores.

Currently, the Department of Homeland Security uses a ‘layered, risk-based approach’ to maritime cargo security. I have long been concerned that this approach is inadequate to address the very real threat.

Analyzing manifest data is no substitute for scanning containers to know definitively what is inside. My concerns worsened over the last couple of years after the Government Accountability Office called into question the effectiveness of CBP’s targeting and examination of high-risk containers. If DHS is going to rely on targeting to identify high-risk containers for additional scrutiny, at least for the time being, it must have a reliable, effective way of doing so.

Over the longer term, DHS must do more to scan and resolve high-risk containers before they are loaded onto a U.S.-bound vessel. As the sponsor of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act, I had hoped that DHS would be further along in implementing the 100% cargo scanning mandate, nearly nine years after enactment of the legislation.

Instead, DHS has argued that it would be too expensive and too difficult to comply with the law. This is simply unacceptable.

The consequences of such an attack are potentially catastrophic, including significant loss of life and economic damages ranging from \$45 billion to more than \$1 trillion, according to experts. That said, I am pleased that Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson has committed to moving toward fulfilling DHS’s responsibilities under the law.

I am encouraged by the Department’s recent publication of a Request for Information, soliciting new ideas from stakeholders regarding processes to help fulfill the mandate. I understand there was a robust response to the solicitation and look forward to continuing to work with the Department in the coming weeks and months on this effort.

Today, I hope to hear from our CBP witness about their plans to further enhance cargo scanning and increase cooperation with their foreign partners, with the support of governmental and private stakeholders. There will be costs associated with implementing a better maritime cargo security system, but given the potential consequences we cannot afford to sit idly by.”

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