

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

Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency Hearing

Building for the Future: Examining Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security's Consolidated Headquarters Project

Thursday, April 12, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.

It has been nearly four years since the Committee held a hearing on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Headquarters Consolidation Project at St. Elizabeths in Southeast, Washington, D.C.

While we have continued to follow the project, we are overdue for a detailed update on the progress that has been made since our last hearing.

With that being said, it is unfortunate that the Under Secretary for Management is not with us today to discuss this pressing issue.

The Under Secretary, being third in command of the Department, and responsible for overseeing its budget and management programs, including procurement, should be on this panel today. I hope we can have her before the Subcommittee in the future to discuss this and many other important issues.

Turning to today's business, stood up in 2003, following the September 11th attacks and the enactment of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Department of Homeland Security unified several legacy agencies from 22 various federal agencies.

The previously existing agencies and DHS's headquarters have been separated since the Department's inception – with the Department operating at over 50 different locations throughout the Washington, D.C. area.

I have repeatedly expressed concern about how this separation of Department personnel has adversely affected cohesive communication, coordination, and cooperation across all component agencies as the Department seeks to fulfill its critical mission.

We learned from Hurricane Katrina that federal government response organizations should be housed together and strengthened in order to better mitigate disasters.

In 2006, a post-Katrina White House after action report called for a new National Operations Center within DHS to integrate Department wide operations and improve coordination of response efforts to catastrophes and other homeland security events.

However, without a consolidated DHS Headquarters to house a new and improved center, its ability to provide robust command and control functions and execute its mission is limited.

Moreover, the delay in consolidation has also hindered DHS's ability to sustain a "One DHS" culture and improve Department morale.

There are several factors behind the rising costs and drastic delays facing the completion of the St. Elizabeths project, and I'm looking forward to an opportunity today to explore those issues further.

Yes, schedules have slipped and cost estimates have not always been accurate, but most importantly – Congressional Republicans have failed to deliver consistent funding throughout the entirety of the project.

Appropriated funding has been far below what was requested by Administrations of *both* parties, and the funding gap has widened over the years – further contributing to project delays and cost inflations.

The Majority claims a desire to reduce waste and save taxpayer dollars, yet their actions show otherwise.

Currently, the Department employees are housed at over 50 buildings, costing the Department over \$1.6 billion annually, as of 2014.

In 2014, GSA estimated that over the next 30 years, the St. Elizabeths project would save the government nearly \$700 million compared to the cost of continued leasing.

Four years later – still kicking the can down the road – I am unsure when or if those overhead savings will be realized.

It is time my colleagues across the aisle put their money where their mouth is and prioritize the completion of the DHS consolidation project.

The operational, cultural, and fiscal implications of the consolidation demand it. As such, I look forward to hearing from DHS, GSA, and GAO about how Congress and the Administration ought to get it done.