

**NEWS ALERT**



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Homeland Security Committee**

*Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member*



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson**

### ***Hearing on: The American Muslim Response to Hearings on Radicalization within their Community***

June 20, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing on “The American Muslim Response to Hearings on Radicalization within their Community”:

“Today’s hearing is the fifth hearing in this Committee’s series on radicalization in the American Muslim community. Since this Committee’s first hearing on radicalization, the Obama Administration has taken several steps in dismantling al Qaeda’s operations abroad. Osama Bin Laden, Anwar al Awlaki and Samir Khan have all been killed.

In essence, the world has changed. But despite a changing world, which requires us to look forward, this Committee seems to want to look back.

We are holding today’s hearing to discuss the effect of previous hearings. I am not sure we have ever had a hearing to gauge the effects of prior hearings.

Given the challenges the nation faces in homeland security—the on-going problems at TSA; the ability of FEMA to meet the needs of disaster survivors; the effect of budget cuts on research and development within Science and Technology, just to name a few—I am not sure that a hearing to gauge the effects of our hearings is the most effective use of Congressional time and attention.

But this is not the first time I have questioned the premise of this series of hearings. Prior to the first hearing, I wrote to the Chairman to request that the coverage of the hearings be expanded to broaden our inquiry into radicalization. I noted that there are domestic groups that may constitute a threat because of a linkage between extreme ideology and a willingness to take violent action. My request was turned down.

As we meet to once again hear testimony about Muslim radicalization, I am pretty sure I know what will be said. I am sure that the witnesses will testify that these hearings have helped Muslims come forward. However, in reality, there was never a problem with Muslims coming forward.

As noted by Attorney General Holder, the cooperation of Muslim and Arab-American communities has been absolutely “essential in identifying, and preventing, terrorist threats.” As further emphasized by Michael Leiter, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, “many of our tips to uncover active terrorist plots in the United States have come from the Muslim community. So we have to make quite clear that the communities are part of the solution and not part of the problem.”

These statements from law enforcement officials and terrorism experts support the notion that the Muslim American community is not afraid to come forward and has been coming forward to

provide tips to police, prevent radicalization and fight terrorism. In short, cooperation of the Muslim American community occurred long before these hearing began.

So, as we consider the effect these hearings have had, I need to be clear about what I hope the effects have not been. I hope that these hearings did not perpetuate the notion that the United States is at war with Islam.

Such a notion would only help the recruitment efforts of al Qaeda and similar groups. John Brennan, the President's chief counterterrorism advisor, has noted that describing our enemy in religious terms lends credence to al Qaeda's propaganda. Although the hearings were narrowly focused on Muslims, I hope they did not have that effect.

I hope these hearings did not encourage a belief among Americans that their fellow citizens are inherently dangerous because of religious affiliation. I know there have been many times in this country's history when those in power have decided that some people are inherently dangerous. Once that determination is made, public officials feel justified in infringing on Constitutionally-protected rights. About a week ago, a group of Muslim Americans filed suit against the New York Police Department for infringing the speech, religion, assembly and due process rights of Muslim Americans.

I hope these hearings did not help provide a Congressional stamp of approval for groups that espouse anti-Muslim beliefs. As noted in a report by the Center for American Progress (CAP), witnesses at these hearings often repeated myths that originated in anti-Muslim think tanks.

But most of all, I hope these hearings did not increase the number of hate crimes against Muslims. According to the FBI, in 2010, "hate crimes" against Muslims rose nearly 50 percent (from 107 to 160) in the United States. Although the statistics have not been released for 2011—the year these hearings started – I hope we do not see an increase.

Mr. Chairman, the actions of this Committee did not create an anti-Muslim attitude in this country. But as elected officials, we have a duty to help decrease negative sentiments and encourage cooperation among all people in this nation. I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle share that belief and remember the words of President Bush in the days after September 11th. He said:

'America counts millions of Muslims amongst our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. In our anger and emotion, our fellow Americans must treat each other with respect.'

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For press inquiries, 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>  
[@homelanddems](#)