

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****A New Approach to Increase Trade and Security: An Examination of CBP's Public Private Partnerships***

November 4, 2015 (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 hearing entitled “A New Approach to Increase Trade and Security: An Examination of CBP’s Public Private Partnerships”:

“I want to touch on an issue that may not seem related to the issue before Subcommittee, but in fact is. This week, the House is considering a highway bill that proposes to increase Customs Users Fees and direct the funding not to staffing or infrastructure at our ports of entry, but to unrelated transportation projects. The very fact that we are here today discussing having local communities and private entities pay for what has traditionally been a government responsibility speaks to the needs at America’s ports of entry.

I strongly oppose diverting homeland security fees to a non-security purpose, and believe that revenue must continue to be used for CBP operations at ports of entry. That is why I have joined with the Ranking Members of the Committee on Ways and Means and the Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Homeland Security in submitting an amendment to the highway bill striking this diversion of much-needed border security funds.

It is my hope that other more appropriate revenue streams will ultimately be utilized for the highway fund because the needs at ports of entry continue to be great. Indeed, CBP previously estimated it would need about \$6 billion over 10 years to modernize its land port of entry inventory to meet its operational requirements.

That figure does not even include staffing needs, and we know that CBP continues to be thousands of officers short by its own staffing model. Clearly, these shortages are the impetus for CBP’s Public-Private Partnership program. While I recognize the interest in finding an alternative means of funding additional staffing and infrastructure at ports of entry in the absence of other revenue sources, I am concerned that the “pay-to-play” aspect of the program may make it difficult for certain ports of entry to compete.

I understand, for instance, that the use of reimbursable service agreements at land ports of entry has decreased recently, likely in part due to their inability to pay for additional services. Meanwhile, use of these agreements at airports, which often have deeper pockets, continues to be strong. This disparity may not be in our interest when it comes to ensuring security and facilitation at all of America’s 328 ports of entry.

So, while CBP’s Public-Private Partnership programs may have their place, I have some questions for the witnesses before us about how the programs operate, how they can be improved, and what must be done to ensure appropriate staffing and resources for all ports of entry. I am particularly interested in hearing from our local witnesses today about their viewpoints on the program, and what their unique staffing and infrastructure needs may be currently and over the longer term. CBP’s Public-Private Partnership program may be a good Band-Aid for addressing our needs at ports of entry, but I doubt it is a cure.

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