



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Securing our Borders – Operational Control and the Path Forward

February 15, 2011 (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 “Securing our Borders – Operational Control and the Path Forward”:

“Just last month, Secretary Janet Napolitano announced the cancellation of the SBInet program.

After over four years and nearly a billion dollars spent, there is little to show for the program.

Like its two predecessor programs, SBInet failed to live up to its promise.

In this case, the third time was clearly not the charm.

While I am pleased that Secretary Napolitano took this long-overdue step, I want to know more about the Department’s plans to deploy alternative border security technology along the borders.

I hope Chief Fisher can share some of that information with the Subcommittee today.

I also would like to hear from the other witnesses before us about what technologies they believe would help better secure our borders.

Mr. Stana has a long history of evaluating the Department’s efforts in this regard, and Mr. Salinas offers a unique perspective with his law enforcement background and as mayor of a key city along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Proven, cost-effective technology is an essential complement to Border Patrol agents and infrastructure, and is particularly valuable in areas where agents and infrastructure are sparse.

DHS, border communities, and the American taxpayers cannot afford another failure.

Beyond the issue of technology, I have long supported a comprehensive border security strategy as a means for achieving border security.

Today, the various agencies that play a role in border security each have their individual strategy and planning documents.

The Border Patrol has its own strategy, for example.

But there is no single, government-wide or even DHS-wide strategy setting forth how the agencies are going to work together to secure the borders.

Given the number of agencies spread over different departments that play a role in this effort, such a strategy is essential to success.

DHS should consider developing such a strategy in coordination with its Federal partners and in consultation with border community governments, law enforcement, and stakeholders.

It is also important to note that being successful at achieving operational control of America's borders means more than just securing the areas between the ports of entry.

America's ports of entry are vital to legitimate trade and travel, but are also used by individuals seeking to enter this country unlawfully or smuggle narcotics and contraband.

Similarly, we must remember that our security challenges are not limited to the southwest border.

Our northern and maritime borders are sometimes forgotten, perhaps because politics often trumps policy in these discussions.

These borders may not have the same number of apprehensions or drug interdictions as the southwest border.

However, they are vast, often remote, comparatively unguarded areas that provide opportunities for illicit activity and potentially even terrorists to enter our country.

We cannot have operational control of our borders without figuring out a way to secure these challenging areas.

Likewise, as the 9/11 attacks and the attempted attack on Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009 showed us, securing the processes by which visitors travel to the U.S. is also essential to obtaining control of our borders.

Meaningful border security will only be achieved when we know who and what is coming into this country, whether by land, sea, or air. "

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