



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Strengthening the Border – Finding the Right Mix of Personnel, Infrastructure and Technology

March 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 “Strengthening the Border – Finding the Right Mix of Personnel, Infrastructure and Technology”:

“In January, after over four years and nearly a billion dollars spent, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano canceled the SBInet program.

Like the Department of Homeland Security’s previous attempts to deploy a “virtual fence” along the southwest border, the program never lived up to its billing.

Technology problems, integration challenges, and management deficiencies plagued the program from its inception.

With so little return on the taxpayers’ investment, I wholeheartedly agreed with Secretary Napolitano’s decision not to continue to deploy SBInet.

However, I am concerned that there are some striking similarities between the Department’s new plan for border security technology and SBInet and its predecessors.

It is my understanding that the new Arizona Technology Plan calls for an integrated system of towers mounted with cameras and radars, as well as Remote Video Surveillance Systems, Mobile Surveillance Systems, and Unattended Ground Sensors.

Is my further understanding that the Arizona Technology Plan comes with a price tag of several hundred million dollars.

All of this sounds very familiar.

We have been told that this time, technology is being selected considering operational needs and cost-effectiveness.

Again, that sounds familiar, since DHS made similar promises when SBInet was launched.

Make no mistake – I do not oppose the use of technology to secure our America’s borders.

To the contrary, I believe technology is an essential complement to Border Patrol agents, Customs and Border Protection officers, Air and Marine personnel, infrastructure, and other resources. But technology must be both proven and cost-effective if DHS is to avoid repeating past mistakes yet again.

I am interested in hearing from our witnesses about how the new plan for border security differs from its predecessors, and how the Department will ensure this technology succeeds where others did not.

DHS must do more than just put a new brand on the old way of doing things.

It is my hope that under Secretary Napolitano's leadership, they will get it right this time.

With respect to personnel, Customs and Border Protection has some of the finest agents and officers not only within DHS, but across the Federal government.

They work along the front lines of our Nation's borders, often under difficult and dangerous conditions, and we appreciate the work they do.

As CBP has grown and the situation along the southwest border has intensified, the men and women that comprise its ranks face new and more difficult challenges.

Specifically, today I would like to hear from Chief Fisher about how the Border Patrol has been affected by its rapid expansion in recent years.

I would also like to hear from General Kostelnik about what personnel challenges his agency is facing.

Finally, I want to reiterate my support for a comprehensive border security strategy as a means for achieving border security.

There is no single strategy setting forth how the relevant agencies are going to work together to secure America's borders.

Given the number of agencies that play a role in this effort, such a strategy is essential.

Again, I urge the Department to work with its Federal counterparts and other border stakeholders to develop such a plan."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or 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>