



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Using Resources Effectively to Secure Our Border at Ports of Entry – Stopping the Illicit Flow of Money, Guns and Drugs

April 3, 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 “Using Resources Effectively to Secure Our Border at Ports of Entry – Stopping the Illicit Flow of Money, Guns and Drugs”:

“Often when we talk about securing America’s borders, the focus is on challenges between the Nation’s ports of entry. However, securing those areas is only one part of achieving border security.

That is why I am pleased that today the Subcommittee is also examining the challenges we face at our Nation’s ports of entry.

During the previous two Congresses, this Committee held several hearings examining these issues, both here in Washington and out in the field along our northern and southern borders.

The Committee received testimony from Federal officials, local community members, and border stakeholders to solicit first hand perspectives on the challenges involved in securing ports of entry.

We also had the opportunity to see Customs and Border Protection’s efforts to interdict guns, drugs, and money smuggled through the ports of entry, as well as individuals attempting to enter the country illegally.

In recent years, DHS has made significant strides toward securing our border crossings.

For example, DHS was instrumental in implementing the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, helping ensure that travelers have the appropriate documents upon entering the country.

DHS has also placed an increased emphasis on stopping the flow of weapons and cash into Mexico by conducting inspections of southbound vehicles and screening 100 percent of southbound rail shipments for contraband.

These efforts and others are paying off.

In the last two fiscal years, DHS personnel interdicted more than 6,800 firearms and more than 7 million pounds of drugs, which represents a 28 percent and 16.5 percent increase, respectively, over the previous two years. DHS also seized \$282 million in illicit currency along the southwest border—a 35 percent increase compared to the previous two years.

Of course, much more remains to be done.

We know from the Government Accountability Office that thousands more Customs and Border Protection officers are needed to secure the ports of entry.

Also, aging infrastructure needs to be updated to accommodate increased traffic and modern security technologies.

Unfortunately, H.R. 1, the Republican continuing appropriations bill, fails to fund these security priorities and instead would cut funding for DHS border security programs.

I would also note that the title of today's hearing references only security concerns like guns, drugs, and cash smuggling.

However, I hope the discussion will also include the need to expedite the flow of legitimate trade and travel. Cross-border commerce is essential not only to border communities, but to the American economy as a whole.

Indeed, Canada and Mexico are the United States' second and third largest trading partners, and the first and second biggest markets for U.S. exports.

Congestion at our Nation's ports of entry serves as a hidden tax on the American consumer as business interests pass the costs incurred by delays on to the public at large.

We are fortunate to have Representative Cuellar as the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee.

As a Member representing a district along the U.S.-Mexico border, he knows these issues well.

Representatives Higgins and Clarke represent districts along the U.S.-Canada border, and also have firsthand expertise in these matters.

These Members understand the need to secure our ports of entry, but also the need to do so while expediting trusted travelers and low-risk cargo into the U.S. They know the importance of these efforts, both to their district and to our Nation.

Therefore, I look forward to hearing their thoughts on the topic before us today."

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