



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Border Security and Enforcement – Department of Homeland Security’s Cooperation with State and Local Law Enforcement Stakeholders

May 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 “Border Security and Enforcement – Department of Homeland Security’s Cooperation with State and Local Law Enforcement Stakeholders”:

“I am pleased that today the Subcommittee is examining the Department of Homeland Security’s cooperation with state and local law enforcement on border security and immigration enforcement matters.

I have had the opportunity to travel to America’s northern and southern borders and have seen firsthand the good work of law enforcement – federal, state, and local – in these regions.

Border security and immigration enforcement are, first and foremost, a federal responsibility.

In recognition of that fact, the federal government has made an enormous investment in border security personnel, technology, and infrastructure in recent years.

However, state and local law enforcement also has an important supporting role to play. When the safety and security of our communities is at stake, cooperation, coordination, and communication in these matters is essential.

Programs like BESTs, IBETs, and Operation Stonegarden are an integral part of promoting communication among law enforcement agencies in border communities, as well as providing the resources necessary for state and locals to assist their federal counterparts.

I would like to hear from our witnesses today about their experiences with these programs, and what we could do to further enhance their collective work on border security.

Unfortunately, one of the invited witnesses, Sheriff Richard Wiles of El Paso County, Texas, could not be with us today.

We are fortunate, however, to have Commander Lopez from the El Paso County Sheriff’s Department testifying on his behalf.

El Paso has been recognized as one of the safest cities in America, despite being located just across the border from Juarez, the most violent city in Mexico.

We often hear people characterizing border towns as violent and even lawless places, but that is certainly not the case with El Paso.

I have visited El Paso on numerous occasions and believe that the cooperation of all law enforcement officers in that community is an important part of their success.

I hope to hear about the good work they’re doing in El Paso County, and in particular about the importance of community policing in keeping a place like El Paso safe and secure.

Regarding federal cooperation with state and local law enforcement on immigration programs, this is not the first time the Committee on Homeland Security has examined the issue.

Two years ago the Government Accountability Office released a report on the 287(g) program prepared at our request.

The GAO report revealed some troubling shortcomings, including insufficient guidance and oversight of program participants.

Also, officials from a majority of the state and local law enforcement agencies GAO reviewed reported community concerns about the use of the program for minor violations or about racial profiling.

I know ICE has made some significant changes in the 287(g) program since the release of that report, and I look forward to hearing more about how the program is functioning today.

As Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, we know that securing America's borders is an enormous task.

It no matter what uniform they happen to wear, the American people expect law enforcement officers to work together.

I look forward to hearing more about how we can promote that cooperation and coordination in the interest of the safety and security of our Nation."

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