

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****The Last Line of Defense: Federal, State, and Local Efforts to Prevent Nuclear and Radiological Terrorism Within the United States***

July 26, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies subcommittee hearing entitled “The Last Line of Defense: Federal, State, and Local Efforts to Prevent Nuclear and Radiological Terrorism Within the United States”:

“I am pleased to see our witnesses today representing the Federal components of this program, sitting next to the state and local folks who will have responsibility for the day-to-day procedures of this nuclear detection program.

We all know that our nuclear detection strategy and equipment at the time of the 9/11 attacks was limited in its capability. Radiation detectors could detect radiation but could not identify isotopes. Radiographic equipment could reveal dense objects, but it would be difficult to pick out a small piece of Special Nuclear Material (SNM). As technologies become more capable they can plug gaps in the current architecture.

For example, remote detection might offer a way to monitor choke points in the United States that terrorists might pass through in transporting weapons. But we have to address more gaps in this portfolio. For example: Several systems use helium-3 tubes for neutron detection, yet the supply is limited. Other gaps we need to fill include sensors that can detect Special Nuclear Materials at long range, and sensors that can operate in isolated areas. Systems now under development have the potential to reduce false positives, speed the flow of commerce, and reduce false negatives – all of which improve security.

Congress has appropriated billions of dollars to deploy available systems, and to support R&D on advanced technologies. These refinements can make future technologies more effective, and has created an R&D pipeline that is intended to generate a steady stream of new technologies and systems. But the engine of this pipeline is proper testing and certification of these cutting edge technologies.

We have seen too many reports about detection technologies being deployed without proper testing and certification. This committee needs to know how DNDO’s Global Architecture will relate to the Department’s R&D process and any subsequent deployment of new technologies. It is imperative that the Secretary makes sure there is no more wasted money spent on devices that cannot be tested and certified to keep our citizens safe. However, given the billion-dollar cut to DHS’s budget being considered in this year’s Appropriations, an emphasis must also be placed on planning for the worst.

The hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to grants for state and local authorities will, without a doubt, affect their ability to fully participate in the nuclear detection architecture and respond accordingly. Threats from terrorism persist and continue to evolve, and our nuclear detection architecture must reflect flexibility and the ability to respond quickly in its capabilities. “

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