



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Hearing on Draft Legislative Proposal on Cybersecurity

December 6, 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 on Draft Legislative Proposal on Cybersecurity:

“As we all know, there is an ongoing and active national debate about what should be done to address this significant vulnerability to our country.

Illegal penetrations or “hacks” of computer networks not only threaten the personal prosperity and privacy of our citizens but also the effective functioning of our government, critical infrastructure and our economy.

As Americans at all levels of society grow increasingly reliant on computers in their personal and professional lives, and those computers become more connected, the scope of this security vulnerability continues to expand exponentially.

To meet its responsibilities as the “Federal focal point for the security of cyberspace,” DHS must have the necessary resources and authorities.

Since 2003, when the Department was designated the lead for Federal efforts to protect the .gov domain and critical infrastructure networks, there have been significant advances in the level of information sharing, cyber awareness, and network security throughout the Nation.

However, there is still a great deal that needs to be done and DHS has to be “front-and-center” in these efforts.

Legislation I introduced earlier this session—H.R. 174, the “Homeland Security Cyber and Physical Infrastructure Protection Act of 2011,”—would enhance the Department’s capacity to help secure networks by moving towards risk-based, performance-based standards that network managers for Federal agencies and critical infrastructure would address in tailored security plans—much like is being done under the Chemical Facility Anti-terrorism Standards program.

I am pleased that the proposed Lungren bill generally adopts the underlying approach of my legislation.

Further, unlike cybersecurity legislation being debated in the other chamber, the proposed bill before us today, just like my bill, refrains from creating a whole new bureaucracy or complicated regulatory framework.

While there is much to like in the Lungren bill, I do have some questions about the “National Information Sharing Organization” provision in this draft legislation.

The bill authorizes the establishment of a quasi-governmental organization to be a clearinghouse for threat information to and between critical infrastructure operators and the government.

All of us appreciate the need for better information sharing between the government and the private sector about threats, hacks, and other troubling cyber activities. However, I am not sure that the answer is to move the epicenter for information sharing from the “National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center” at DHS to a new, not-for-profit organization that, as drafted, is not accountable to the Federal government or DHS.

For that matter, I am troubled by aspects of cybersecurity legislation recently approved by the Intelligence

Community—where there could be a direct interface between members of the Intelligence Community and the private sector.

The longstanding firewall between the IC and the private sector was erected for very good reasons.

DHS has shown itself to be an effective intermediary and partner. Diminishing DHS' role in information sharing as would occur under the Intelligence Committee bill or, for that matter, under the NISO proposed in this bill does raise concerns.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to see that your draft legislation has taken some of the ideas I put forward, and also some of the ideas from the White House proposal.

Taken together, a strong bipartisan bill will make our Nation more secure and better position the Department to fulfill its mission.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman. I too, welcome our witnesses who took the time and interest to come today, and I look forward to the discussion.”

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