

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Jihadist Use of Social Media—
How to Prevent Terrorism While Protecting Innovation***

December 6, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Jihadist Use of Social Media--How to Prevent Terrorism While Protecting Innovation”:

“Social media offers an instant ability to communicate and interact with others. We saw the use of social media in Egypt’s Tahrir Square. We see it in Occupy Wall Street.

The power and potential of a message traveling from one keyboard to thousands of screens in an instant is something we still have not fully grasped. In a few short years, the use of social media has altered the way we receive our news, deliver our opinions and take the national pulse.

The great gift and the great danger of this tool is its ability to change the marketplace of ideas. There are no censors and money does not control who gets access. It may be the closest thing to true democracy that we will ever see. But we cannot ignore the dangers that always come from new technologies.

We should not be surprised that social media can be used as a tool to espouse messages of fear and terror; to cultivate extreme viewpoints; to inspire terrorists, and to glorify acts of carnage. Websites, blogs, and tweets are probably the most inexpensive weapons in the arsenal of any extremist. And a quick search of the Internet will produce content from extremists of all stripes—from Al Qaeda sympathizers to Neo-Nazis. All have found a place on the Internet to espouse their particular brand of hate and violence. In the 110th Congress, this subcommittee held a hearing on ways to address the use of social media by violent extremists.

In that hearing, we learned that social media can provide an array of open source information that the government and outside entities can use to study domestic and foreign terror groups. We learned that social media can be used for counter-messaging and promoting information sharing with our state, local, and federal law enforcement partners.

I hope that today, we build upon the work done in the last Congress. I would suggest that we begin a serious discussion about whether social media without personal contact can actually “radicalize” and spur to action. As we consider the real threat of “lone wolf” actors, we need to understand whether social media can also be used as a way to diffuse the ticking bombs that may live among us.

Mr. Chairman, I hope the witnesses can help light our way on this difficult issue. And finally, as we seek to make this nation safer, let us never forget that we must keep this nation strong by assuring that the freedoms contained in the First and Fourth Amendments of the Constitution are not trampled.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and gaining more ideas on how social media can be used to prevent terrorism without stifling our rights.”

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