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**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson**

***DHS Monitoring of Social Networking and Media:  
Enhancing Intelligence Gathering and Ensuring Privacy***

February 16, 2012 (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 “DHS Monitoring of Social Networking and Media: Enhancing Intelligence Gathering and Ensuring Privacy”:

“Social media outlets provide the general public with new avenues of discovering, reading, and sharing news, information and other forms of content. With an increasing number of people relying on this form of technology as a primary information gathering resource, social media has supplemented, and, in some cases replaced, traditional media outlets as a source of news and information.

Social media allows DHS to quickly and efficiently disseminate accurate and useful information to hundreds of thousands of people simultaneously.

For instance, prior to a natural disaster such as a hurricane or a flood, state and local officials can use SMS to convey evacuation warnings and notices to people living in affected areas. After a disaster, the same means can be used to direct people to FEMA.

Both the Majority and the Minority of this Committee have a twitter page. I think we all agree that social media outlets are useful. However, usefulness alone is not the only criteria we value.

Rapid deployment of accurate information combined with the ability of the average citizen to interact with public officials will ultimately increase accountability and trust in DHS. To ensure that accountability and trust are embraced as a value, DHS must employ proper safeguards including guidelines on information gathering activities and a clear policy on creating a profile or data mining.

If information gathering activities should occur, clear protocols that adhere to the Constitution and the Privacy Act must be developed to direct such activities. The public must be confident that interacting with DHS on a website, a blog or on Facebook will not result in surveillance or a compromise of constitutionally-protected rights.

Further, the use of social media must not replace traditional methods of information distribution.

When used appropriately, social media is an efficient and effective way to communicate with people. If used improperly by a Federal agency, public trust and confidence will be compromised or forever destroyed. Given the high stakes involved, DHS cannot afford to make a mistake.

I trust that in your effort to navigate the Department’s journey in the world of social media, you work closely with this committee and keep us informed of your activities. We look forward to being your GPS.”

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