

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Building One DHS: Why is Employee Morale Low?***

March 22, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Oversight, Investigations, and Management subcommittee hearing entitled “Building One DHS: Why is Employee Morale Low?”:

“For too long, the Department of Homeland Security has been plagued with low morale, employee dissatisfaction, and rankings at or near the bottom of federal human capital surveys. Eleven years into the Department’s existence, it remains at or near the bottom in federal government rankings.

There are more than 220,000 employees who serve everyday at the Department in an effort to keep our country secure. They are clear on their mission, and according to the latest Office of Personnel Management survey, 91% of those responding believe that the work they do is important.

And it is. Department of Homeland Security employees represent the front lines at our Nation’s airports, land and marine borders, and ports of entry. They are called when disaster and emergency strikes and they uphold the immigration laws of our Nation.

They develop technology for homeland security and homeland defense missions and work with other federal agencies to protect and secure our infrastructure. They protect the President of the United States and over 9,000 federal buildings across America. They also work at the Department’s headquarters, providing the managerial and administrative means for the Department to fulfill its mission.

And this exhaustive list does not fully cover what it takes on a daily basis to staff and operate the third-largest agency in the Federal Government.

Yet, despite numerous Government Accountability Office recommendations and insight on where the problems lie from surveys conducted by the Office of Personnel Management and the Partnership for Public Service, the Decrement has yet to figure out a strategy for improving its employee’s morale.

Given its mission, this lack of human capital strategy is not about numbers, it is about the security of our country.

The solution must come from the top.

Unfortunately, the position responsible for establishing human capital priorities, recommending program improvements, and implementing corrective actions – the Chief Human Capital Officer – has seen one of the highest turnover rates out of all Department leadership positions.

Including those serving in an acting capacity, there have been eight different Chief Human Capital Officers at DHS since 2003. Only one has served more than two years. Most last about thirteen months. Moreover, the Department has yet to achieve the level of diversity that is reflected government-wide.

In every category except one, the number of racial and ethnic minority employees at the Department is lower than the federal average.

It is no secret that the current economic climate has caused federal agencies to do more with less, but I am encouraged that the 2011 OPM survey revealed that 96% of respondents feel that they are willing to put in extra effort to get the job done and 90% feel that they are constantly looking for ways to do their job better.

To the contrary, only 78% feel that they are treated with respect by supervisors and less than half, 46%, believe that promotions are based on merit.

I applaud the efforts put into place by Secretary Napolitano such as the new Workforce Strategy, the Leader Development Program and the Integrated Strategy for High Risk.

I am also pleased to see the addition of a Diversity and Inclusion Officer at the Department. However, I am deeply troubled that employees continue to rank the Department at or near the bottom. Hopefully, today's hearing will shed light on how to improve this dismal picture."

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