

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****First Responder Technologies: Ensuring a Prioritized Approach for Homeland Security Research & Development***

May 9, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee and the and the Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies subcommittee joint hearing entitled “First Responder Technologies: Ensuring a Prioritized Approach for Homeland Security Research and Development”:

“This hearing will give us an opportunity to hear the concerns of state and local stakeholders about the grant consolidation proposal in the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2013 Budget.

As Members of this Committee, we must have serious concerns about the effect this grant consolidation proposal may have outside of Washington—in the real world.

Our concerns must reflect the concerns of the state and local first responders all around this nation. It is our duty to assure that they have adequate resources to meet their homeland security responsibilities.

Our concerns must reflect the concerns of the port and transit operators. As we look around the world, we know that port and transit facilities have a high risk of terrorist attack.

As Members of Congress, our first obligation to the American people is to assure that there is help and hope before, during, and after a disaster. So our concerns about this grant consolidation must reflect the concerns of the many people who find themselves in need of help after a disaster.

But our responsibilities do not stop there. As Members of Congress, we have an obligation to assure that the Constitutional duties of this institution are not taken over by another branch of government. If we permit this grant consolidation, we will be giving away a part of our Constitutional duty to make decisions about Federal spending.

But let me be clear. This Administration did not usurp these powers. These grants were first consolidated in FY 2012. At that time, Secretary Napolitano consolidated grants because she was directed by this Republican-controlled Congress to do so.

Many of my friends on the other side of the aisle supported those grant consolidations. State and local governments were told that these cuts were necessary because of the austerity of the times. Those of us who opposed those grant cuts warned that vital homeland security functions would be harmed. But the bill passed and the Secretary was told to create a system for cuts and then begin cutting.

So it should have come as no surprise that in the Administration’s FY 2013 Budget request, the grant consolidation approach that had been demanded by Congress in the previous year had been adopted and expanded.

Now, it appears that Congress wants to reconsider its original directives to the Administration.

I completely support our reconsideration of grant consolidation. Before we ask that a program be reduced or eliminated, we need to first ask whether it works.

But we do not know about the effectiveness of these programs because this Committee has not done the oversight to determine whether the programs are effective.

Additionally, we have all heard anecdotes about how the reduction in Federal funding will severely undermine state and local homeland security objectives. While we have heard these stories, we cannot assess their accuracy. We need to hear from state and local governments about how the lack of Federal funding will affect their efforts to keep this nation safe.

In other words, now is the time for us to ask the questions we should have asked and get the answers we should have known before this House required a consolidation and cut scheme in the FY2012 budget.

I am glad that we are taking the time to gather this evidence. Hopefully, we will use our findings to inform the budget process.”

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