

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Department of Homeland Security: An Examination of Ethical Standards***

May 17, 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 “Department of Homeland Security: An Examination of Ethical Standards”:

“Today’s hearing will focus on the ethical standards in place at the Department of Homeland Security and allegations regarding employee misconduct at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and the Transportation Security Administration. I would like to say at the outset that these three agencies form the backbone of our homeland security enterprise.

Everyday CBP employees work tirelessly to secure our land and maritime borders at and between ports of entry. At ICE – the second largest federal law enforcement agency – over 20,000 employees enforce federal laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration. And everyday almost two million travelers at 450 airports across the United States depend on TSA employees to implement our multi-layered approach to aviation security.

While we discuss the small percentage that represents the bad apples in the barrel, I want to first acknowledge those that perform their mission with integrity and thank them for a job well done. However, as the saying goes, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. It is imperative that the Department take seriously each and every allegation of employee misconduct.

Department of Homeland Security employees come into contact with sensitive, sometimes classified, information and, in many instances, are national security interests literally lie in the palms of their hands. As a result, corruption or ethical misconduct occurring at the Department can have far greater national security implications than misconduct occurring at other federal agencies. Therefore, the Department must have robust internal policies, standards and procedures in place that address head on employee corruption.

The DHS Office of Inspector General is independent and has the primary authority within the Department for investigating allegations of criminal misconduct among Department employees. Yet, the OIG’s budget declined in Fiscal Year 2011 and only received a slight increase in Fiscal Year 2012. Moreover, it is woefully understaffed given the size and magnitude of the Department’s mission.

To put this in perspective, the Department of Homeland Security has over 220,000 employees. The Department of Health and Human Services has 65,000 employees, approximately one third of the Department’s workforce. Yet, the Department’s OIG budget was less than half of the HHS OIG budget in FY 2010 and 2011. The HHS OIG had a FY 2010 budget of \$312 million and a FY 2011 budget of \$342 million. In comparison, the Department’s OIG budget was \$151 million in FY 2010 and \$150 million in FY 2011.

In light of the OIG being understaffed and underfunded, it comes as no surprise that there exists a backlog of cases needing further attention. Moreover, I am concerned about whether the numerous agencies responsible for investigating employee misconduct at the component level operate in a cooperative manner with the DHS OIG and with each other. Hopefully, the witnesses can shed light on this today.”

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