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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

***DHS Information Technology: How Effectively Has DHS
Harnessed IT to Secure Our Borders and Uphold
Immigration Laws***

March 19, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency hearing entitled “DHS Information Technology: How Effectively Has DHS Harnessed IT to Secure Our Borders and Uphold Immigration Laws”:

“When done right, Information Technology (IT) plays a critical role in strengthening the Department’s mission.

From screening technology at airports to video surveillance on the border to management systems used Department-wide, IT is used by every single component agency, in addition to the Department writ-large.

The last thing we need, however, are IT systems that are plagued with problems that make it more difficult to carry out the homeland security mission.

In Fiscal Year 2012, the Department spent approximately \$5.6 billion – almost 15 percent of its total budget—on IT systems.

Given the magnitude of this investment, it is imperative that we ensure that limited taxpayer funds were put to good use.

In some instances, the Department’s IT systems have been worth the investment; yet others have been beset with waste, mismanagement and a lack of contractor oversight.

According to the Government Accountability Office, approximately two-thirds of the Department’s major IT systems are meeting their cost and schedule commitments.

However, those systems that are not meeting the goals total approximately \$1 billion.

The problems found with these systems include inaccurate preliminary cost and schedule estimates, changes in agency priorities, and a lack of understanding of user priorities.

These are the same shortcomings that were present in the \$1.5 billion, cancelled SBInet program, the troublesome e-Verify system and the Department’s most recent effort to consolidate its financial management system, which, like SBInet was cancelled with nothing to show for the money that was spent.

Until internal changes are made within the Department, I am concerned that the next ten years will look too similar to the past ten years while the security of our Nation hangs in the balance.

Recent budget cuts, in addition to the ongoing sequester, have caused the Department’s border and immigration-related components to do more with less.

Every single employee at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection has received a Notice that furloughs may be pending.

Many employees at Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) fear the same outcome.

Yet, cost overruns and inadequate estimates cause these agencies to spend money that could be used to offset increasingly shrinking budgets.

For example, the USCIS transformation system has been riddled with problems from the start.

To date, USCIS has spent almost \$715 million on its transformation system.

This amount is \$290 million more than the original estimate.

To make matters worse, since being launched in 2008, the system works so poorly that it has only been able to process a mere 16,000 applicants.

This is less than the proverbial “drop in the bucket” considering that USCIS processes 30,000 applications for immigration benefits a day.

If the program stays on its current course, it is estimated to cost almost \$3 billion, more than five times the cost associated with the original plan.

I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses as we seek better solutions for improving the Department’s IT function, both on the border and Department-wide.”

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