

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Counterterrorism Efforts to Combat a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Attack on the Homeland***

April 25, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for Counterterrorism and Intelligence subcommittee hearing entitled “Counterterrorism Efforts to Combat a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Attack on the Homeland”:

“I would also like to thank the witnesses for appearing to testify on our efforts to counter the threat from a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack. Let me begin by publically thanking the FBI, Joint Terrorism Task Force, Department of Homeland Security, and the state and local officials for their efforts in apprehending a suspect in the Boston Marathon Bombing. Their efforts were a great example of state, local, and federal agencies working together.

State and local officials also need to work with federal agencies to be prepared and ready in the event of an attack from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons. In 2008, The Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism produced a report called “World at Risk”. In that report, they told us that they believed that a terrorist attack would occur somewhere in the world by 2013, and that it was more likely to be an act of biological terrorism.

Well, 2013 is here and there are examples of how we need to be ready. During the week of April 15, we learned that poisoned letters were sent to a United States Senator and the President. While the poison contained in the letters, ricin, did not reach the Senate office nor the White House, the incident sparked terrible memories of the 2001 anthrax attack which killed five people and infected 17 others.

Not only can CBRN threats come from within our borders, but there are also CBRN threats from abroad. On Tuesday, Secretary of State Kerry told NATO that there needs to be a plan to guard against the threat of chemical weapons. We have also been paying close attention to North Korea, who has vowed to bolster its nuclear program. North Korea repeatedly violates United Nations Security Council resolutions that forbid the “building and testing” of long-range ballistic missiles. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral Samuel Locklear, commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, testified that North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles represents a clear threat to the United States and its allies in the region. Admiral Locklear stated, in the event of an attack by North Korea, that he believes the United States has the ability to defend Guam, Hawaii, and U.S. allies. The Admiral rightfully has faith in the U.S. military as most Americans do. However, he is living in the reality of the continuing budget cuts that the Department of Defense, including Pacific Command, faces. According to the Admiral, the impacts of sequestration have created budget uncertainties, limiting our flexibility to manage risk and could potentially undermine our long-term strategic rebalance momentum.

Mr. Chairman, we have applauded not only the resilience of Americans throughout our tenure on this Committee, but also those first responders and troops who protect and defend our country in the wake of both man made and natural disasters. For instance, we are still applauding the people of Boston who are coming together singing “Sweet Caroline” in the wake of the horrific attack on one of their most cherished holidays. We rightfully and continuously

salute the New Yorkers who have persevered in the wake of 9/11 as we have those who had to rebuild the Mississippi Gulf Coast after hurricanes and oil spills.

But now, is Congress saying that it knows that we are living with a nuclear threat, but cannot adequately fund the military and the Americans who may be in harm's way? Can we not guarantee that in the event of an attack, we will provide our military with the resources that it needs to be as resolute as New Yorkers were in the wake of 9/11?

Since 9/11, there has been particular focus to not just the military, but first responders who must be ready for any type of catastrophic event, including an attack from a chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapon. We saw and commended the efforts of first responders last Monday during the Boston Marathon attack. These first responders did not know whether the bomb was an IED or a "dirty bomb". They knew people were hurt and they needed to step in and save lives.

Congress authorized funding for several cities and regions to make investments in emergency communications, planning, and response equipment. But during the 112th Congress, much to their surprise, thirty one cities and urban areas found that they became ineligible for grant funding that they rely upon to maintain their preparedness – through no fault of their own. This left several first responders without the ability to maintain the equipment they purchased to provide protection and assistance in the wake of a CBRN and other attacks. However, there are two areas of the country for which the Department of Homeland Security has created specific funding through its Securing the Cities program.

I do not doubt that these areas need the money. I do not dare to say that these areas do not have vulnerabilities; however, it has been stated in previous hearings throughout several Congresses that a CBRN attack can happen almost anywhere in this nation. As I stated previously, there are areas of the United States that are under a stated threat from the Supreme Leader of North Korea, and there are areas of the United States that are vulnerable to a CBRN attack from a lone wolf or terrorist cell. I hope our conversation today provides an opportunity to understand the role and needs of first responders related to CBRN threats. For this conversation to be productive, its content should not be concentrated to just one area of the country."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>