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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

“Emergency MGMT 2.0: How @SocialMedia & New Tech are Transforming Preparedness, Response, & Recovery #Disasters #Part1 #Privatesector”

June 4, 2013 (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 hearing entitled “Emergency MGMT 2.0: How @SocialMedia & New Tech are Transforming Preparedness, Response, & Recovery #Disasters #Part1 #Privatesector”:

“I have served on this Committee for over a decade. During that time, I have witnessed natural disasters and terrorist attacks. And I have seen the use of social media evolve as a tool in our efforts to keep this nation safe.

When you compare the response following Hurricane Katrina with the response following Hurricane Sandy, it is clear that both the government and the public have grown increasingly adept at integrating social media into emergency response activities.

The advent of social media has provided the general public with new avenues for sharing information and organizing private response activities.

And social media allows the government and private sector to disseminate useful information to hundreds of thousands of people. We cannot underestimate the value of useful, accurate information before, during and after a disaster. It can save lives.

So while I support the innovative use of social media and big data in disaster preparedness and response, we must be certain that this technology is not only used appropriately and effectively, but also that the information distributed is reliable.

I was particularly troubled by misinformation that circulated after the Boston Marathon bombings, which incorrectly identified a missing man as a possible suspect.

And while I am not advocating censorship, I am concerned that social media may not have the appropriate policies in place to ensure either that disaster-related information is accurate, or that inaccurate information is quickly removed.

Additionally, I have concerns about how law enforcement uses social media in executing investigations. We must take some reasonable steps to assure that the users of social media have a clear understanding of privacy rights and protections.

Although an expectation of privacy in personal information placed on social media networks may not be reasonable, there is a reasonable expectation that the information will not be used to engage in data mining or otherwise target individuals who are exercising constitutionally protected rights.”

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