



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Why Can't DHS Better Communicate with the American People?

June 14, 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 “Why Can't DHS Better Communicate with the American People?”:

“When the Department of Homeland Security was established, it was clear that this newly created agency would interface with the American people and serve as a source of public information.

In fact, included in the original documentation that laid the framework for the Department was the statement that DHS would serve as “One department to coordinate communications with state and local governments, private industry, and the American people about threats and preparedness.”

To that end, how the Department communicates with the public and whether the American people are fully-informed is important.

The purpose of the Office of Public Affairs is to coordinate the public affairs activities of all of the Department's components and offices, and serve as the federal government's lead public information office during a national emergency or disaster.

Unfortunately, much like other areas throughout the Department, there is a lack of cohesion between the Department's headquarters-based Public Affairs personnel and public affairs personnel operating in the components.

Each Department component has its own Office of Public Affairs that handles component-level communication strategies and press releases.

This structure runs afoul of the “One DHS” concept.

Too often, this has resulted in component level Public Affairs offices and the headquarters Office of Public Affairs disseminating different messages.

To make matters worse, the high turnover in leadership at the Office of Public Affairs has resulted in a further divide.

Since January 2003, there have been ten Assistant Secretaries of Public Affairs, serving in either an Acting or Permanent role.

This turnover has left the office in a constant state of influx and has affected its ability to effectively carry out its mission.

Public Affairs is also responsible for communicating many of the Department's public campaigns.

One such campaign is If You See Something Say Something, which was the brainchild of the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA).

The Department receives some funds to carry out this campaign; however, the campaign and slogan is owned by MTA.

I am interested in determining how funding for the campaign is shared and whether taxpayer dollars from the Department's scarce budget are paid to New York for the use of a slogan that, according to testimony that we will soon hear, is not widely-recognized.

Finally, I am also interested in hearing testimony from the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on how they address the public's civil rights and civil liberties concerns, as they relate to the Department's programs and policies."

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