

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Emergency MGMT 2.0: How #SocialMedia & New Tech are Transforming Preparedness, Response, & Recovery #Disasters #Part2 #Govt/NGOs***

July 9, 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 #Part2 #Govt/NGOs”:

“Last month, this Subcommittee heard testimony from private sector witnesses who described the social media and big-data technologies that emergency managers and first responders can use to improve disaster response activities.

Google.org and Palantir brought to bear impressive resources during Hurricane Sandy and the Boston Marathon bombings. PSE&G – a Newark, New Jersey utility company – described its social media efforts to keep its customers informed of power restoration efforts after Hurricane Sandy. PSE&G’s is sharing its best practices and lessons learned with other utilities and critical infrastructure companies.

From Hurricane Sandy to the tornadoes in Oklahoma, it is clear that social media is becoming a staple in effective disaster response. Both the public and government entities involved in disaster response have come to rely on social media to supplement and enhance situational awareness and outreach activities.

This kind of innovation can not only be cost-effective but it can also saves lives. That said, we cannot lose sight of social media’s inherent vulnerabilities: the security and accuracy of information shared.

As Jason Payne from Palantir aptly noted during the June 4 hearing, social media platforms must include “robust, built-in measures to allow users appropriate access and to share information . . . while protecting privacy and civil liberties.”

I look forward to learning about the policies used by FEMA and its nongovernmental partners to ensure that potentially sensitive information gathered to inform disaster response is destroyed when it is no longer needed. I also look forward to hearing that this information is used only for the purpose of disaster response.

Additionally, I am concerned about the circulation of misinformation during a disaster. We all know that rumors and unverified information can undermine legitimate response activities. I understand that FEMA launched Rumor Control, a website devoted to correcting misinformation circulated by social media sites, in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

That is a good start. But I am interested in learning about the guidance FEMA provides to its State and local government and private sector partners about how to verify information before it is shared. I am also interested in learning about the type of guidance provided to help verify open source information that authorities may gain from social media.”

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