

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Fulfilling A Key 9/11 Commission Recommendation:
Implementing Biometric Exit***

September 26, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Fulfilling A Key 9/11 Commission Recommendation: Implementing Biometric Exit”:

“I am pleased the Subcommittee is meeting today to examine the Department of Homeland Security’s efforts to deploy a biometric exit system to record the departure of visitors to this country. As Chairman of this Committee, I held hearings and conducted oversight of DHS’s activities on this important matter, and have long believed that we must do more to address the issue of immigration overstays.

Deploying a biometric exit system – as recommended by the 9/11 Commission and mandated repeatedly on a bi-partisan basis by Congress – is an important part of that effort. Much of the focus in the immigration reform and border security debate is on our Nation’s southwest border, but an estimated 40 percent of individuals unlawfully present in the U.S. entered this country legally and overstayed.

Yet a dozen years after September 11, 2001, DHS is still without a biometric entry-exit system to positively identify those who failed to depart this country as they were required to do. That is why I am an original cosponsor of H.R. 3141, a bill authored by Rep. Candice Miller, to again require DHS to deploy a biometric exit data system at ports of entry. I believe the bill takes a very reasonable, phased approach to deploying the system. DHS should have sufficient time to put in place the necessary technology, infrastructure, and personnel without causing undue delays to legitimate travel and commerce.

Indeed, Congress first mandated an entry-exit system for visitors to this country in 1996, and required that the system be biometric as early as 2001, so this requirement does not come as a surprise to DHS. I look forward to hearing from our Customs and Border Protection (CBP) witness today about what substantive steps the agency is taking to deploy biometric exit at ports of entry.

I specifically want to hear what CBP’s schedule and benchmarks are for achieving this mandate. I also hope to hear from our GAO witness about whether DHS is on track to make timely progress on exit, based on the work GAO conducted for its July report on overstays. I recognize that deploying a biometric exit system will not be an easy task, but continue to believe it is essential for our homeland security.

The time has long since passed for excuses about why it cannot or should not be done. Instead, DHS – with support and resources from Congress – needs to find a way to make it happen.

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