

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****October 29 Full Committee Markup***

October 29, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee Markup of H.R. 1095, H.R. 1204, H.R. 1791, H.R. 2719, H.R. 2952, and H.R. 3107:

“I am pleased that the Committee is getting back to the business of legislating after the government shutdown. The measures we will be considering today have the potential to improve the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of DHS operations.

These are bipartisan bills. Four of these bills have gone through regular order this Congress. Two are reintroduced versions of bills that this Committee advanced in the last Congress.

I am pleased that legislation I authored to make permanent the Aviation Security Advisory Committee is being considered today. We do not need to look too far into the past to see what happens when TSA makes unilateral policy or programmatic decisions. TSA’s decision to allow knives on planes serves as a reminder. Additionally, TSA unilaterally decided to shift responsibility for security operations at exit lanes to airport operators.

Inexplicably, TSA did not formally engage with the ASAC on this security question. That is a problem. An effective partnership between TSA and air carriers, airports, and other aviation security stakeholders starts with open lines of communication.

I am also pleased that legislation authored by the Ranking Member of the Cybersecurity Subcommittee, Representative Clarke, will be considered today. There is a lot of interest on both sides of the aisle in improving DHS’ capacity to execute its cybersecurity mission. The “Cyber Boots-On-The-Ground Act” represents a major step forward. It would require DHS to develop a comprehensive list of job classifications so that human resource officers are able to identify specific hiring needs. It also directs DHS to, for the first time, do a comprehensive cyber workforce assessment and workforce strategy. These are essential building blocks to DHS’ efforts at building its cyber workforce.

The two bills, authored by the Transportation Security Subcommittee Chairman Hudson and Cybersecurity Subcommittee Chairman Meehan will also improve key aspects of DHS operations.

I also support the other two noticed measures—H.R. 1791 and H.R. 1095. Ordinarily, I would stop there and commend my colleagues for their thoughtful legislation, but today feels different.

The government shutdown changed things. We have come out of a period where over 31,000 Department employees were furloughed virtually bringing a halt to many DHS administrative functions, including the writing of strategies, plans and reports to Congress. It was a particularly tough time for non-furloughed DHS personnel.

These dedicated men and women were asked to remain vigilant and protect the nation from terrorism and other threats without assurances that they would be paid.

The shutdown was disruptive, not only to DHS personnel, but to U.S. businesses that were denied

access to E-Verify, the Internet-based system that allows employers to determine the eligibility of prospective employees to work in the U.S.

Over 404,000 employers are enrolled in this system, and in FY 2012 alone more than 21 million queries were processed through the system. One often-overlooked aspect of the shutdown is its impacts on small business.

We have heard about hotels, restaurants, and vendors near national parks seeing sales plummet, but little notice has been paid to the disruption the shutdown had on small businesses that work with the government. With outstanding government invoices unpaid, those small businesses struggled.

The shutdown was the latest in a series of insults that Federal workers have had to withstand in recent years. From pay freezes to hiring freezes to long-term Continuing Resolutions to sequestration, the DHS workforce has had a tough few years. Sequestration alone has resulted in a 670 million dollar reduction to DHS funding.

As a result, DHS, which is without a permanent leader, has put in place a hiring freeze that is expected to result in up to 2,600 vacancies by the end of the fiscal year.

According to the National Border Patrol Council, the union representing Border Patrol agents, sequestration caused CBP to make \$754 million in reductions in Fiscal Year 2013 and to execute these cuts, CBP has had to reduce training, facilities maintenance, and supplies. ICE saw a 417 million dollar reduction in funding and, as a result, has had to curtail investigation resources.

I could go on, but my point is that we need to acknowledge that while the mandates in these bills are the right way to go, responsibility to carry them out will fall on the shoulders of the DHS workforce. I offer this observation in the hopes that the same bipartisan spirit we exhibit here today can be brought to bear to reign in the sequester and deliver a long-sought after full-year appropriation bill for DHS.”

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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>