

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****What Does a Secure Maritime Border Look Like?***

November 19, 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 “What Does a Secure Maritime Border Look Like?”:

“I know the Subcommittee has focused largely on our land borders in its oversight hearings of late. While that is a critically important issue, I am pleased to see the Subcommittee examining the security of our maritime borders as well. As challenging as managing our land borders with Canada and Mexico may be, in many ways the maritime domain poses an even greater challenge.

The variety of threats we face, the vast areas involved, and our relatively limited resources make securing our maritime borders no easy task. That task gets more difficult every day with sequester on top of other recent budget cuts to the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection's Air and Marine.

I hope we can have a frank discussion about these cuts and what they mean operationally for the Coast Guard and CBP and their ability to secure our maritime borders. I look forward to a discussion about our current maritime border security priorities and what more needs to be done to address those priorities.

Today, the Government Accountability Office is releasing a report I requested on one threat to maritime security – small vessels. As we have seen in incidents such as the bombing of the USS Cole, small vessels can pose a serious threat to U.S. interests both at home and abroad. I look forward to hearing from our GAO witness, Mr. Caldwell, about this report as well as what more remains to be done to address this threat.

I am concerned by GAO's findings in another of its recent reports – this one regarding DHS's efforts to secure maritime cargo. It is my understanding that GAO found CBP has not done an assessment of risks at foreign ports related to its Container Security Initiative (CSI) program since 2005.

GAO did its own calculations and determined that less than half of the CSI locations are at high-risk foreign ports. If DHS has failed to assess the security of foreign ports in the last eight years, and if its CSI is deployed mostly at medium-and-low-risk ports, can the program be achieving its intended purpose?

These troubling findings certainly undermine DHS's contention that it has a robust and dynamic risk-based container security regime in place, despite its continued refusal to even attempt to implement the 100% cargo security scanning mandate.

Just as our land borders won't be secure until we know what is coming through our ports of entry, our maritime borders won't be secure until we have greater certainty about the cargo arriving at our shores.”

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