

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Help Wanted at DHS: Implications of Leadership Vacancies on the Mission and Morale***

December 12, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Help Wanted at DHS: Implications of Leadership Vacancies on the Mission and Morale”:

“The Department of Homeland Security employs almost 240,000 employees. Located in every state of the union and over 75 foreign countries, DHS employees are on the frontlines each day. They secure our land, air, and maritime borders; enforce our immigration laws; safeguard critical infrastructure and cyberspace; and respond to natural disasters.

I understand that today’s hearing is to consider whether vacancies in senior-level positions at the Department affect the morale and effectiveness of the Department’s mission. Before I continue, allow me to provide some context for the hearing. The majority says that 40 percent of the leadership positions at DHS are vacant.

According to statute, there are 28 positions within the Department that require Presidential appointment and senate confirmation. Of those 28 positions about 15 are filled with an official who is serving in an acting capacity. Only one position is listed as vacant. So, as it turns out, that 40 percent represents very small number of people.

It is difficult to understand how the morale of almost 240,000 people would be adversely affected by whether 15 people at headquarters have the word “acting” listed in their titles. Those officials who are listed as acting are still empowered and expected to do their jobs, implement orders and carry out the normal functions of the position. As we consider the morale and mission effectiveness of these nearly 240,000 employees, we should consider the factors that have a real and direct effect on their day-to-day lives and, therefore, may affect morale and mission.

Further, as we consider the morale of the Department’s employees, we need to acknowledge that in every survey on workplace satisfaction, conducted by every organization, inside or outside of the government, the department has always ranked at or near the bottom.

The Department has been at or near last place since the day it was established. It was at or near last place in employee morale under Secretaries Ridge, Chertoff and Napolitano. Consistent dysfunction is an indication of a structural issue—not an indication of a momentary problem.

Fortunately, this Committee has a long history of oversight of the management and administration of the Department. Our oversight has shown that the DHS suffers from a disjointed organizational structure and that employee morale is adversely affected by the uncertainty that comes from that disjointed structure. The Department’s organizational structure leaves the officials at headquarters with little authority and leaves the employees in the field with little hope. Headquarters officials may issue management directives, but they do not have a mechanism to enforce those directives; meanwhile, the employees have few places to turn.

Mr. Chairman, if we want to positively affect the morale and mission effectiveness of the employees

at the Department, we should pay less attention to the acting status of particular officials and more attention to the power of officials to act. The organizational structure of this Department—which only we can change—prevents headquarters officials from requiring uniformity, transparency and accountability in procurement, personnel practices and disciplinary processes used in the components.

If we want to assure that moral and mission effectiveness improve, we should use our legislative authority to act by assuring uniformity in the rules, standards and practices used by the Department. These rules, standards and practices directly affect the everyday lives of nearly 240,000 people. To that end, I would suggest that the Chair press his leadership to assure Floor action on the Homeland Security Authorization Act that this Committee ordered reported in October. This measure has yet to be considered by the House. It contains a Democratic-sponsored provision that would strengthen the authority of those officials in headquarters to require uniformity, transparency and accountability in employment practices.

This would be the kind of change that would help the morale of these employees. I have a great respect for the employees of the Department. Day after day, they go to work, fulfill their mission and protect this nation. They knowingly walk into a workplace where few people are happy. Yet, the Office of Personnel Management found that over 87% of these employees believe that the work they do is important.

These employees should be able to look to Congress for solutions and support. Finally, Mr. Chairman, I wrote to you requesting that we have a representative from the Department to discuss their efforts to improve workplace morale. Your response indicated that a witness from DHS would not be necessary because “there is little connection to DHS as the source of the leadership vacancy problem.”

I agree that the source of the vacancy problem at DHS is not within the Department. All indications are that the source of the vacancy problem at DHS and other federal departments is the Republican minority in the Senate who have used the constitutional duty to advise and consent as an excuse to obstruct and deny.

Clearly, with the removal of the filibuster weapon for certain appointments, we are finally seeing movement on the President’s nominations. I hope you join me in looking forward to the approval of Mr. Johnson to head the Department of Homeland Security. When Mr. Johnson becomes Secretary Johnson, I hope this Committee will work with him to resolve the employee morale and vacancy issue at the Department. In the meantime, this House should use its power to give the Department the necessary resources and legislative authority to achieve the goal of improving employee morale at DHS.”

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