



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

The Secretary's Vision for the Future – Challenges and Priorities

February 26, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The Secretary’s Vision for the Future – Challenges and Priorities”:

“Welcome, Mr. Secretary. I am pleased that our Committee is the first in Congress to hear your vision for DHS. I understand that the day after being sworn in as the Fourth Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, you went to New York City—to the National September 11th Memorial. That quiet act reflects an appreciation of the magnitude of the job.

First and foremost, DHS was established to help make sure that America never experiences a day like that again. Specifically, DHS was established to: improve terrorism prevention and safeguarding aviation and other critical infrastructure from physical and cyber threats; achieve interoperability, so that our first responders can communicate during an attack or other emergency; make our land, air, and sea borders more secure; and bolster emergency preparedness, response, and resilience at all levels.

In the ten-plus years since the Department was established, some progress has been made but, as the Comptroller General and any Member of this Committee can tell you, more needs to be done for DHS to become the agency that Congress envisioned and the American people deserve.

The 233,000 men and women who serve in the Department and the 314 million Americans that it protects are looking to you to be the leader who takes DHS to the next level.

Your last Federal position was at the Defense Department. I know you have not been at DHS long, but I am sure you have noticed that the level of “command and control” to which you may have become accustomed is absent.

Last week, you experienced the potentially damaging results of this structural defect. The fact that an acquisition solicitation with significant privacy implications was published without approval by DHS or “the awareness of ICE leadership” is very troubling.

Your immediate predecessor promoted the concept of “One DHS” but structural challenges persist that date back to when 22 independent offices and agencies were essentially thrown together under one roof.

As you have undoubtedly learned by now, DHS components essentially function as independent entities. All-too-often, components see directives from Headquarters as advisory. That has to stop.

For “One DHS” to truly have meaning, components must adhere to Department-wide policies and mandates.

This Committee has consistently supported - on a bipartisan basis - granting authority to the Chief Officers of the Department to ensure adherence to Federal and Department-wide policies and mandates throughout DHS.

Short of re-doing the Federal appropriations process, this is the surest way to provide you with needed authority to prevent costly acquisition debacles and deliver timely progress on homeland security initiatives.

Mr. Secretary, there are a number of DHS programs that warrant your immediate attention. Decisions need to be made on whether to reform or, in some cases, end them these programs. I urge you to ask tough questions and keep the lines of communication open with Members of this Committee who have considerable knowledge about these matters.

On the subject of communication, I want to acknowledge my appreciation for the outreach to me and others on the Committee. We look forward to working constructively with you.”

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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>