

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****The Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan and its Impact on Border Security***

March 12, 2014 (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 “The Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan and its Impact on Border Security”:

“I thank Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Jackson Lee for holding today’s hearing on the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan. This Committee has long conducted vigorous oversight of DHS’s attempts to deploy security technology along our Nation’s borders. Frankly, there has been no shortage of need nor opportunity to conduct congressional oversight of these programs in recent years.

Going back to the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System (ISIS), then the America’s Shield Initiative (ASI), and later Project 28 and SBInet, DHS and its predecessor have over-promised and under-delivered when it comes to border security technology procurements. When I was Chairman, the Full Committee held multiple hearings examining the problems with SBInet that ultimately resulted in Secretary Janet Napolitano canceling the program in January 2011.

SBInet was supposed to use technologies such as fixed sensor towers and cameras and a common operating picture to create “virtual fence” along the southwest border. However, at the time the program was canceled, CBP had deployed SBInet to only 53 miles of border in Arizona at a cost of about \$1 BILLION.

Late last month, three years after cancellation of SBInet, CBP awarded a contract for a major component of its newest border technology program – the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan. This Plan is intended to include a mix of radars, sensors, and cameras to provide additional security for the Arizona border at a total cost estimated at about \$1 BILLION.

That sounds awfully familiar, doesn’t it? Though not identical, there are some striking similarities between the canceled SBInet program and CBP’s new technology plan for Arizona: both are aimed at providing surveillance technology along the Arizona border, both rely significantly on towers with cameras and radar systems, and both have price tags of about \$1 BILLION.

The similarities between the programs go beyond these attributes to some of the management challenges shared by both, as we learned from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report being released today. GAO monitored SBInet closely for this Committee, and we are fortunate to have them doing the same for the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan at our request.

With respect to the new Plan, GAO found that CBP is not following best practices for scheduling, verifying cost estimates with independent sources, testing technology to determine effectiveness and suitability, or establishing performance metrics for the technology.

In short, GAO’s initial work on the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan indicates this initiative suffers from some of the same deficiencies that ultimately contributed to the

Department canceling the SBInet program. Those of us who participated in SBInet oversight hearings held out hope that CBP learned its lessons from that program and would be applying them to this new effort in Arizona.

However, it is troubling that CBP did not concur with some of the important recommendations made by GAO in today's report, and I hope to hear a thorough explanation as to why. Many Members of Congress, including me, support the use of technology along America's borders, but it must be procured, deployed, and utilized in an appropriate, cost-effective manner.

Otherwise, CBP could again be left with a border security technology system that fails to deliver as promised. I thank the witnesses for joining us today, and I look forward to a frank discussion about the current status of the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan and what can be done to ensure it is on the right path forward."

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