



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson**

***The Executive Proclamation Designating the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks a National Monument: Implications for Border Security***

July 10, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency hearing entitled “The Executive Proclamation Designating the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks a National Monument: Implications for Border Security”:

“President Obama recently signed a Presidential Proclamation designating the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region as a National Monument.

The new monument encompasses key areas of cultural, historical and environmental significance in our Nation’s history.

For example, included within the monument are the training sites for the Apollo Space Mission, the Butterfield Stagecoach Trail, Billy the Kid’s Outlaw Rock, Geronimo’s Cave, World War II aerial targets, 243 known archeological sites, and thousands of Native American petroglyphs and pictographs.

Moreover, the designation is expected to bring positive economic impact to the surrounding local communities and spur new jobs in this region.

In fact, a recent independent study found that this new national monument could generate \$7.4 million in new economic activity each year from visitors and business opportunities while preserving access for sportsmen, ranchers, and recreational users.

The benefits of this designation are numerous, yet, some have opposed, in whole or part, the President’s proclamation.

I am compelled to note that over 100 years ago, some Members of Congress and community activists opposed the designation of the Grand Canyon as a national monument, which now serves as one of the most well-preserved and frequently visited national landmark.

As today’s hearing title implies, concerns have also been raised regarding the implication the National Monument designation has on border security.

It is uncertain; however, whether these concerns are valid, given the steady presence of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) along the monument’s borders.

Moreover, many positive strides have been made by the current Administration to safeguard our border security.

As the Committee has previously learned, communities along the United States’ borders are among the safest in the United States, and surveys of border community residents consistently report that citizens who live along the border feel protected.

Furthermore, the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument is located in New Mexico, which is not known for illegal immigration attempts or trafficking.

In fact, CBP officials stated that the Administration's designation of the monument will allow its agents greater flexibility in carrying out their border security mission.

A diverse array of stakeholders consisting of business owners, security experts, environmental groups, and community advocates worked for over 10 years with local, state and federal officials to build support for a monument designation.

This broad-based support, along with the parameters outlined in DHS's Memorandum of Understanding with the Departments of Agriculture and Interior to provide a sufficient framework to preserve a national treasure, and safeguard our borders."

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