

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Port of Entry Infrastructure: How Does the Federal Government Prioritize Investments?***

July 16, 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 “Port of Entry Infrastructure: How Does the Federal Government Prioritize Investments?”:

“On this Committee, we are fortunate to have Members who represent districts on our northern and southern borders and know firsthand the importance of having sufficient infrastructure and staffing at our ports of entry.

Today, there are about 21,775 Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers staffing 329 air, land, and sea ports, including 167 at the land borders. On an average day, about \$2 billion in trade crosses the land borders, along with 350,000 passenger vehicles, 135,000 pedestrians, and 30,000 trucks. Of all goods moved in U.S. international trade, about a third is with Canada and Mexico, and almost 90 percent of that moves by land.

Unfortunately, port of entry infrastructure and staffing has not kept pace with the demands of this robust travel and commerce. While the 2009 stimulus provided sufficient funding to modernize CBP-owned ports of entry, General Services Administration (GSA) ports remain in dire need of modernization and expansion.

Indeed, unmet needs at just our existing land ports total an estimated \$6 billion. In recent years, Congress has failed to provide adequate funding to make progress toward addressing these needs. Indeed, in three recent years, until last year, Congress did not provide any funding for land ports at all.

As a result, some ports suffer from insufficient or outdated infrastructure that makes it difficult to deploy necessary, modern security technology or to deploy sufficient personnel to move people and goods in a timely manner.

Similarly, while Congress recently appropriated funding to hire an additional 2,000 CBP officers, the agency remains several thousand officers short of what it needs to properly staff ports of entry and fulfill its security and trade facilitation missions. This staffing shortage often results in increased wait times and long lines at our land borders for the commuters, visitors, and businesses that rely on cross-border travel.

These wait times have a detrimental effect on the American economy. Delays at U.S.-Mexico border crossings alone cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$7.8 billion in 2011. Ultimately, these costs are borne by American consumers. Some communities, like El Paso, which owns three ports of entry, have decided to fill this gap by participating in public-private partnership initiatives authorized by Congress.

Under these arrangements, local entities pick up the tab for CBP officer staffing to close the gap between the staffing the government provides and what is necessary to keep wait times reasonable.

While this may be a good stop-gap solution, the Federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funding to ensure CBP has the staffing to carry out its border security and trade facilitation missions.

Today, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how port of entry infrastructure needs are identified, prioritized, and ultimately funded. Along with support from Congress, ensuring this process works efficiently is essential to ensuring our ports of entry are ready to meet current demands at our borders.”

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