

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Protecting the Homeland from Nuclear and Radiological Threats***

July 29, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies subcommittee hearing entitled “Protecting the Homeland from Nuclear and Radiological Threats”:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, and the radiological and nuclear smuggling threats it faces. I want to thank the Director of DNDO, and the GAO team for coming in to testify today.

We will hear testimony about some of the successes, and some of the challenges that still exist in preventing terrorists from acquiring, transporting, and using radiological materials as a potential weapon of terror.

We know that our nuclear detection strategy and equipment at the time of the 9/11 attacks was limited in its capability. Radiation detectors could sometimes detect radiation, but could not identify isotopes. We also found out that sensing equipment could reveal dense objects, but it would be almost impossible to pick out a small piece of Special Nuclear Material, or SNM. Today, as technologies have become more capable, they can fill more gaps in the current nuclear detection architecture.

But there’s still a long way to go to fulfill the goals we set for DNDO, and many questions to ask. For example, are we making progress on remote detection that might offer a way to monitor choke points in the United States that terrorists might pass through transporting weapons?

And, we have identified other gaps, like the need for long-range sensors that can operate in isolated areas, and systems that can perform efficiently in highly congested public maritime areas. These kinds of technologies and sensors do not come easily, or inexpensively.

But, we need to have systems under development that have the potential to reduce false positives, speed the flow of commerce, and reduce false negatives – all of which improve security. Over the years, Congress has appropriated billions of dollars to deploy systems to prevent nuclear smuggling, and to support R&D on advanced technologies.

What we hope for is that money Congress spends to achieve these refinements can make future technologies more effective, and create an R&D pipeline that is intended to generate a steady stream of new technologies and systems.

However, Congress must be sure that the money it spends for this technological pipeline is used wisely and efficiently, and that testing and certification of these cutting-edge tools are thoroughly evaluated and validated. Over the years, we have seen too many reports about detection technologies being deployed without proper testing, and without certification.

The development & procurement of sophisticated technologies is not a simple matter, but it is also not one that should be opaque and overly complicated for Congress to understand.

We know that DNDO has an important role across the Department, and that it has close relationships with DHS’s front-line programs, and other federal agencies, who depend on them for support and advice.

The challenge for this Committee is how to evaluate how well DNDO meets the operational requirements for DHS programs, how it spends its money and prioritizes its R&D, and how it fulfills its responsibilities in coordinating the Global Nuclear Detection Architecture.

We will hear testimony from GAO today about the need for a clearer, and measurable picture of its goals, strategies, and procedures.

It is imperative that the new Secretary makes sure no more money is wasted on devices that cannot be properly evaluated, tested, and certified before being procured and placed into duty. Our country's safety depends on it."

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