

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Leadership Challenges at the Department of Homeland Security***

March 26, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Leadership Challenges at the Department of Homeland Security”:

“Last Thursday, this hearing was officially noticed as “Leadership Challenges at the Department of Homeland Security”. The Department of Homeland Security certainly has several leadership challenges that I want to discuss.

For instance, I still want to know why, despite the United States Secret Service’s Protective Missions Panel’s recommendations, the Secret Service still has not brought someone from outside the agency into its leadership. However, I see from press releases, the title now includes allegations of improper influence regarding special visas.

On Tuesday, the Inspector General publicly released the results of an investigation into employee complaints about management of the investor visa program managed by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, better known as the “EB-5 program.” The report centers around Deputy Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas’ efforts when he was the Director of USCIS. For the purposes of background, the EB-5 program accounts for less than one percent of all visas issued by USCIS.

Nonetheless, the EB-5 program’s potential as a job-creator gives it visibility to Congressional leaders from across the political spectrum. On average, USCIS is contacted over 1,500 times per year about specific cases. I am sure that those communications did not come from just one office or one party.

Yet, for years, the EB-5 program, like many USCIS programs, had well-documented management issues and challenges that demanded action. In the absence of Congressional action to address the wide range of woes this program faced, Mr. Mayorkas, while the Director of USCIS, took on those challenges. I have read the Inspector General’s report and find it instructive insofar as it is a window into Deputy Secretary Mayorkas’ leadership style.

The picture that emerges in this report is of an activist manager who demanded reform and responsiveness from his agency. It seems that, at times, Mayorkas’ style made employees feel uncomfortable. That is unfortunate and I am sure that Mr. Mayorkas, if he was here today would express regret about that.

I commend Inspector General Roth for taking a hard look at the charges leveled by these whistleblowers. I hope that the Inspector General will continue to take such action when whistleblowers are involved.

However, I regret that the headlines and news accounts about this report are not in line with the Inspector General’s actual findings. Mr. Chairman, a man’s reputation is at stake. Before we jump to conclusions and join the bandwagon of media reports, we must be responsible. For the record, the

Inspector General did not find that Deputy Secretary Mayorkas broke any laws. Instead, the Inspector General acknowledges that Deputy Secretary Mayorkas and the USCIS personnel recognized the risks to the program if benefits were granted without transparency and were not adjudicated according to statute, regulations, and existing policy.

In fact, the report explicitly states that the decisions made by Mr. Mayorkas were “legitimately within his purview”. And despite news accounts of political favoritism, the Inspector General also did not find that a single adjudication in question was improperly decided. The report did, however, find a wide range of resentment within the component. Unfortunately, resentment towards management and low morale is not an anomaly at DHS.

Consequently, Mr. Chairman, it is a fair question to ask if the hands-on, reform-minded leadership style that Deputy Secretary Mayorkas seems to have exhibited here is what DHS needs to address its longstanding management and operational challenges. It is also fair, as Secretary Johnson has indicated, to look into the protocols of the program and see what changes can be implemented, including changes in the law that Congress could enact.

Mr. Chairman, I want to remind you that just two days ago, in this hearing room, Former House Speaker Gingrich urged us, as, Members of Congress, to stop being obstructionists and work together, especially in the interest of security.

What is unreasonable is to degrade Deputy Secretary’s integrity and reputation. I hope that is not what we are here to do. I hope that today we can receive testimony and gain more insight to both the program and the Inspector General’s findings.

I also hope that at a future hearing we can have the Deputy Secretary testify on the reforms he made at USCIS and the changes he is making at the Department of Homeland Security and how we can truly address the leadership challenges at DHS.”

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