

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Full Committee Markup of H.R. 2899***

July 15, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup of H.R. 2899:

“On the Homeland Security Committee, a long-standing concern has been the prospect of an attack being carried out on U.S. soil by an individual inspired by the violent extremist propaganda generated by a domestic or foreign terrorist group. As a result, understandably, there has been steady interest in efforts to counter violent extremism in the U.S. and other Western nations, including the U.K., Canada, and Australia.

More recently, in response to ISIL's sophisticated online propaganda and recruitment machine, interest in "CVE" programs, as they have come to be called, has greatly intensified. On a daily basis, ISIL dispatches thousands and thousands of Internet messages to promote its violent, terrorist ideology. The volume of this terrorist chatter is concerning.

However, ISIL is not alone when it comes to spreading violent extremist ideology over the Internet and social media. Sovereign citizen groups and other anti-government groups have, over the past few years, successfully recruited new members through the use of mainstream sites such as Facebook as well as through dedicated extremist sites such as NewSaxon and Stormfront.

Though the recent deadly attack in South Carolina-- carried out by an individual who frequented such websites and displayed symbols of hate and oppression, such as the flag of the Confederacy-- is in our immediate thoughts, the role that these websites play in domestic terrorism has been a concern for some time.

Lest we forget that the foiled 2008 plot to assassinate President Obama in a deadly shooting spree was planned by two white supremacists who were reportedly introduced on a social networking website. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Stormfront-- “the first major hate site on the Internet”-- hosts subforums in over a dozen languages and nearly half of its traffic comes from outside the U.S. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that there is a wide range of political and ideological goals behind overseas-based calls for violence in the U.S.

There are no easy solutions to this security challenge, as the paths to terrorism are as diverse as the perpetrators. Last week, Mr. Chairman, you told your hometown paper that “[w]e can’t afford to tackle these challenges at a bureaucratic speed when terrorists are recruiting our citizens at broadband speeds, which is why my Committee will also consider legislation the same day to accelerate counter-radicalization efforts here in the homeland.”

Yet, surprisingly, the solution that H.R. 2899 offers to the urgent violent extremism challenge is to expand the bureaucracy you criticized. At a minimum, Committee Members should have received public testimony from the Department of Homeland Security about its CVE activities prior to being asked to establish a standing CVE office with \$40 million in funding.

Let the record reflect that DHS refused my request to testify at today's Full Committee hearing on CVE. According to DHS, it could not furnish a witness to testify because without its interagency partners—the FBI, NCTC, and the Department of Justice—the Department could not provide the Executive Branch’s position on CVE.

Additionally, Committee Members should have been provided the Department's long-overdue CVE strategy prior to being asked to codify new authorities within DHS that were never formally requested by the Department. After last week's off-the-record Committee briefing by the Department's top CVE official, in our classified space, I have serious questions.

For example, to what degree is DHS willing to give needed attention to the significant threats posed by sovereign citizens and other anti-government groups who, like ISIL, are actively engaging in recruitment for violence? Until this Committee sees DHS' CVE strategy and has the opportunity to evaluate it, there is simply no justification for granting DHS a host of new authorities and resources. Later, I will be offering a Substitute Amendment to allow Committee Members to give urgent attention to CVE instead of a "bureaucratic response".

Incidentally, my amendment is modeled after bipartisan legislation that Chairman McCaul and I advanced last Congress that required a strategy, a implementation plan, and metrics for another significant homeland security challenge -- border security.

With no Departmental strategy laying out its vision for such an office, I cannot support the underlying bill at this time. Further, I find the thoughtful letter we received last Friday from 42 human rights, civil liberties, good government and community-based organizations, including the Brennan Center, NAACP, and ACLU, compelling.

It sets out their grave concerns with H.R. 2899 and asks that it not be considered at this time. I urge any Committee Member who has not read that letter to do so now. In conclusion, I am disappointed that H.R. 2899 is being considered today as Committee Members do not have basics to assess the measure.

There is no CVE proposal pending from the Department. There is no DHS strategic plan to provide clarity about how the \$40 million in dedicated funding and expanded authorities would be utilized. There is no testimony from DHS, in an open setting, in response to concerns about transparency and the concerns that many Americans have about how current CVE programs are being carried out."

# # #

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

**United States House of Representatives**  
Committee on Homeland Security  
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515  
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499  
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>