

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Transparency, Trust and Verification:
Measuring Effectiveness and Situational Awareness along the Border***

March 1, 2015 (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 “Transparency, Trust and Verification: Measuring Effectiveness and Situational Awareness along the Border”:

“We are fortunate to have Members representing border districts – one on the northern border and one on the southern border – leading the discussion today. Of course, this is not a new discussion. This Committee has held several hearings over the years examining DHS’s efforts to improve situational awareness along our Nation’s borders and develop metrics to assess the state of border security.

Achieving situational awareness of 8,000 miles of land border with Canada and Mexico, not to mention thousands more miles of maritime border, is no easy task. With the support of Congress, in recent years, DHS has deployed an unprecedented number of Border Patrol agents, new technology including cameras and radar systems, and assets such as UAVs in order to improve situational awareness. Due in large part to the vast, open spaces of America’s borders, much more remains to be done.

I hope to hear from our witnesses today about where DHS has made progress on situational awareness, where the most significant gaps remain, and how we can best go about addressing them. This Committee has also discussed border security metrics, and particularly how we can determine whether the Department of Homeland Security’s border security efforts are working. We have seen Border Patrol shift from reporting miles of border under “operational control” to reporting apprehension data to trying to develop a Border Condition Index.

Today, the Department uses risk assessments to characterize the state of areas of the border. Measuring border security effectiveness is more complex than it may seem, in part due to differences of opinion on what constitutes “border security” in the first place. For some, border security means stopping people from crossing the southern border between the ports of entry.

It is that, but it is more. It also means securing our northern border, our maritime borders, and our air, sea, and land ports –not just from individuals entering unlawfully, but also narcotics and other contraband and, most importantly, terrorists.

We need a meaningful, workable set of metrics that offers an accurate assessment of security of all of our Nation’s borders, both at and between the ports of entry. I hope to hear more from our witnesses about what the most relevant metrics might be. I am especially pleased that we are joined today by a witness from the Government Accountability Office, Ms. Rebecca Gambler. GAO has done some very important work on border security matters on behalf of this Committee. I hope to hear from Ms. Gambler about what GAO’s body of work indicates about the state of situational awareness and security along our borders. Indeed, I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses about how we can continue to better secure our Nation’s borders.”

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