

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****State of Emergency: The Disaster of Cutting Preparedness Grants***

March 14, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee hearing entitled “State of Emergency: The Disaster of Cutting Preparedness Grants”:

“I have been responsible for overseeing how the Federal government supports State and local preparedness and response activities for well over a decade – first as a Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security in the 108th Congress and now as the permanent Committee’s Ranking Member.

It has been my job to make sure that we never forget about the devastating events of September 11, 2001. I take seriously the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission that should our first responders be called upon once again to respond to a terrorist attack, they have the training and equipment they need to do so more safely.

I have worked hard to ensure that the Federal government works with State and local governments to make the right investments with Federal grant dollars – to make sure that money is spent on building lasting capabilities rather than on equipment that may not last or work as promised.

From where I sit, I can say with confidence that Federal grant investments have worked. We saw the capabilities achieved with UASI funds in action after the Boston Marathon Bombings in 2013.

Boston had used its funding to train and equip tactical and specialized response teams - including Explosive Ordnance Disposal detection and disruption - SWAT, and maritime units. The region used funds to host Integration of Bomb Technicians into Tactical Operations Training, which trained Improvised Explosive Device (IED) teams to operate with SWAT teams.

In 2011, Boston participated in a Joint Counterterrorism Awareness Workshop. That exercise included more than 200 participants from Federal, State, and local governments and involved an integrated response to a 24-hour-long scenario in which multiple coordinated assaults occurred, much like the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India.

These grant investments were critical to Boston’s successful response to the marathon bombings. Indeed, former Boston Police Commissioner Davis testified before this Committee that without grant funding, the “response would have been much less comprehensive than it was” and without the exercises supported through UASI, “there would be more people who had died in these . . . attacks.”

Other cities and States across the country have echoed Commissioner Davis’ praise of the grant programs. From achievements in interoperable communications capabilities, to emergency preparedness planning, to bolstering our ability to respond to CBRNE events, it is clear that homeland security grants yielded real results.

It is also clear that the threats we face are growing and evolving. From the November terrorist attacks in Paris to the December attack in San Bernardino, we have learned that first responders will be called on to thwart and respond to more unconventional attacks.

We must do everything in our power to help them be prepared to do so. That is why I was disturbed that the Administration proposed cutting the preparedness grants by nearly half a billion dollars in its FY 2017 budget request.

I would note that this is not the first time grants have been raided to balance the budget.

In FY 2011, the first year the Republicans regained the Majority, targeted homeland security grants were cut from \$2.75 billion to \$1.9 billion, and we have seen the cuts continue ever since. This year, we have been told that the proposed grant cuts are the result of the Administration's attempt to adhere to the arbitrary budget caps that continue to hamstring our ability to address evolving threats.

Cuts like these are penny-wise and pound foolish. Until Congress decides to act on meaningful budget reform legislation, we will continue to find ourselves in a predicament of our own making: deciding whether to fund DHS operations or first responder grants.

I thank our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to their testimony. Their statements will serve as an important reminder of the value of grant investments."

#

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>