

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Transferring Guantanamo Bay Detainees to the Homeland: Implications for States and Local Communities***

April 28, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency hearing entitled “Transferring Guantanamo Bay Detainees to the Homeland: Implications for States and Local Communities”:

“Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States faced the question of what to do with so-called “unlawful combatants” captured in military operations in Afghanistan or other counterterrorism operations. The answer, at the time, that military leaders seized upon was a U.S. military prison located within the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba.

The first twenty detainees arrived at the Guantanamo Bay prison on January 11, 2002. Since that time, Guantanamo Bay has served as a prison camp to detain dangerous individuals, to interrogate those individuals on suspected acts of terrorism, and to prosecute those individuals for war crimes.

At its peak, there were nearly 800 individuals held at Guantanamo Bay. During the Bush Administration, more than 500 were released to their home countries or transferred to a third country. This month, the Department of Defense announced that with the transfer of nine detainees to Saudi Arabia, the total number of individuals currently at Guantanamo Bay is 80.

I want to make it clear that Guantanamo Bay has served its purpose and must be closed. Closing the Guantanamo Bay detention facility is a national security imperative. Its continued operation weakens our national security by furthering the recruiting propaganda of violent extremists, hindering relations with key allies and partners, and draining Department of Defense resources.

In 2009, President Obama signed an Executive Order expressing these concerns and ordering the closure of the detention facilities. As part of the closure, it may be necessary for those detainees who cannot be transferred to a third-party country to be imprisoned in the United States in facilities deemed to be able to safely, securely, and humanely house detainees for the purpose of military commissions and continued law of war detention.

Today, I expect to hear concerns of the national security implications for transferring suspected terrorists to the United States. Some of the witnesses may even say that bringing detainees to the United States brings terrorism to our own backyards.

Based on years of research and analysis by the Departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security, these concerns simply are not supported. There is no evidence that suggests housing Guantanamo detainees will bring additional attacks, attention, or danger to the United States.

In fact, America has a long track record of incarcerating dangerous terrorists. Some of the most dangerous terrorists the world has ever known are incarcerated in U.S. maximum-security prisons, such as the Supermax facility in Colorado.

In fact, the man who tried to bring down the World Trade Center in 1993 and his co-conspirators have been serving multiple life sentences in Supermax since 1997. No one—terrorist or any criminal—has ever escaped from the Supermax prison. The only person charged in the 2012 terrorist attack on the U.S. compound in Benghazi is currently being held in Alexandria, Virginia, approximately 15 miles from where we are sitting now.

Some who oppose the transferring of detainees to U.S. soil are fear-mongering that it would damage State tourism. The facts do not support this argument.

Tourism has gone up – considerably – in both Virginia and Colorado, even as both have terrorists in their Federal prisons. In fact, Virginia’s tourism revenues topped \$22.4 billion in 2014, a 4.1 percent increase over 2013, while Colorado posted a record 71.3 million visitors and \$18.6 billion in revenue.

In Fiscal Year 2015, the cost to operate Guantanamo Bay was approximately \$445 million. In addition to these annual costs, maintaining the facility in the future would require an additional \$200 million.

Closing the facility is expected to save between \$140 and \$180 million annually. The plan President Obama delivered to Congress represents the best and most secure way to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay.

Today, I encourage everyone to focus on the facts and not base-less fear. I look forward to your testimony and fact-based answers to my questions today.”

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