



COMMITTEE ON
**HOMELAND
SECURITY**
DEMOCRATS

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, *Ranking member*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

***From the Border to Disasters and Beyond: Critical Canine
Contributions to the DHS Mission***

Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

May 18, 2017

This Committee has a long history of oversight of the Department's canine programs. I am pleased the Subcommittee is focusing on this important issue once again. In the wake of the September 11th attacks, law enforcement agencies at all levels established or expanded the use of canine units as an additional layer of security.

Today, the canine programs at the Department of Homeland Security are among the most robust in the Federal government. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) operates the Nation's largest law enforcement canine program, while the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) runs the largest explosive detection canine program.

Trained canines have the ability to contribute to the homeland security mission by detecting everything from explosives and contraband to people and harmful plant pests. These unique capabilities make them valuable tools for law enforcement and homeland security personnel. That said, there are important questions to be answered about DHS's use of canines, including the most effective way to procure, train, and deploy the dogs.

For example, in recent years the Government Accountability Office has raised important questions about how TSA assesses its canine program and whether it could reduce costs by using conventional canines rather than passenger screening canines.

Similarly, there are questions about whether and how DHS coordinates canine programs across components to share expertise, exchange best practices, and perhaps save costs.

I would note, for example, that while CBP has combined its legacy Border Patrol and Field Operations canine programs, training is still conducted at separate sites and we have two CBP witnesses before us today.

Finally, the use of canines in certain environments, such as Border Patrol interior checkpoints, raises important civil liberties concerns for many, including millions of Americans who must go through these checkpoints as part of their daily lives.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today in response to some of these concerns, as well as more details about their current operations and future plans for their programs.

I also intend to have a conversation about the potential impact President Trump's proposed cuts to the Department's canine programs may have on operations.

Cutting important DHS programs to build a multi-billion dollar border wall does not make for good homeland security policy, nor does it make Americans safer.

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