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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Full Committee Markup

June 8, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup:

“Today, the Committee will be considering seven bills that share one common feature — a focus on transformation.

We have before us legislation that seeks to transform the National Protection and Programs Directorate into an operational agency and rebrand it the “Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Protection Agency.”

This measure, if enacted, could help DHS chart a new course as it carries out its cyber, infrastructure protection, and emergency communications missions.

The job of mapping out a new agency is a complicated one.

While there is much to like in this bill there are some areas that, as the bill moves through the legislative process, could be refined.

DHS Secretary Johnson proposed this reorganization as part of his “Unity of Effort” Initiative to foster more collaboration between cybersecurity and infrastructure protection operations.

Favoring one division over the three others, as the bill appears to do, is inconsistent with the spirit of this effort.

This measure, by rebranding NPPD as the “Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Protection Agency” has the potential to improve morale among chemical inspectors, cyber analysts, protective security advisors, emergency communications specialists, and Federal Protective Service officers.

It can bring the workforce together in an unprecedented way.

The two measures authored by Committee Democrats are also focused on transformation.

The measure that Oversight Subcommittee Ranking Member Watson Coleman introduced seeks to ensure that future comprehensive strategic reviews undertaken by the Department are more robust.

The Quadrennial Homeland Security Review, if done right, should drive decision-making about how DHS organizes itself to address the vast range of risks we face.

The measure that CIPST Subcommittee Ranking Member Richmond introduced is focused on ensuring that the transformational research that the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office pursues addresses gaps in our Global Nuclear Detection Architecture.

We will also be considering two measures that focus on enhancing DHS’ support for innovation—the “Support for Rapid Innovation Act” and the “Leveraging Emerging Technologies Act”.

I am pleased to cosponsor the second measure—H.R. 5389—which directs DHS to engage, in an unprecedented fashion, with developers of innovative and emerging technologies.

When it comes to tackling vexing homeland security challenges, Washington does not have the monopoly on ground-breaking, forward-thinking ideas.

To help bolster the level of cybersecurity among small businesses, H.R. 5064 directs DHS and the Small Business Administration to collaborate in an unprecedented fashion to transform Small Business Development Centers, located across the nation, into one-stop shops for small business owners to learn about best practices and timely cyber threat indicators.

Finally, we will be considering visa security legislation that includes provisions that, like legislation I sponsored, has the potential to transform DHS' ability to vet and screen visitors to the U.S.

I am pleased to see that the Hurd ANS seeks to significantly strengthen the Visa Waiver Program and PATRIOT provisions from where they were in the bill, as introduced.

These provisions are in keeping with the "Expanding DHS Overseas Passenger Security Screening and Vetting Operations Act," legislation I introduced the same day as this measure.

It is essential to better secure America's visa system. To do that, we must ensure the Department expands its presence at high-risk, visa-issuing posts. We should also supplement those activities with remote visa vetting at locations where it is not possible to be physically present.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not note that implementing these provisions and a new social media screening regime, which I understand will be considered today, carries significant new costs.

I look forward to working with my Republican colleagues to ensure Congress authorizes the funding necessary for the Department to carry out this critically important work."

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