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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Counterintelligence and Insider Threats: How Prepared is the Department of Homeland Security?

July 13, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Counterintelligence and Insider Threats: How Prepared is the Department of Homeland Security?”:

“In a time where threats and issues regarding domestic and foreign terrorists, emergency preparedness, immigration, and aviation seem to be at the forefront of our thoughts and concerns, the issues surrounding how we secure the information that informs all of those polices is often forgotten.

In the nearly decade and half since the 9/11 attacks, both the committee and security officials have worked together to increase the security workforce and information needed to better secure our homeland.

One of the primary recommendations from the 9/11 Commissioners encouraged the United States to improve its intelligence gathering and information sharing activities.

This resulted in more employment positions that allow access to classified information, which requires security clearances.

While it is clear that the sharing of classified and unclassified information between our domestic and international partners is imperative to keep us all safe, it also presents a number of issues.

Of those issues, the one we will discuss at length today is the increase in opportunities for bad actors to exploit our workforce and information through sabotage, theft, espionage, and fraud. Bad actors commit these acts in order to gain competitive advantages for economic and political reasons all over the world.

Another issue is the massive proliferation of original and duplicative classified material and the exponential growth in the number of individuals with security clearances.

Both present significant homeland and international security challenges.

An estimated 4.5 million people held security clearances in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014.

The costs of security clearance investigations vary significantly, depending on clearance levels.

However, in FY 2014 the minimum cost for a top-secret clearance investigation was almost four thousand dollars, while the minimum cost of a secret clearance was three hundred dollars.

Additionally, the cost of maintaining the security classification system across the Federal Government was estimated at more than \$11 billion dollars for FY 2013.

Within that amount, the estimate for the cost of protecting and maintaining Federal classified information was more than four billion dollars.

To say we have made a significant financial investment in our classified security systems is an understatement.

However, none of those financial resources matter as much as the continued investment that needs to be made to monitor those systems.

In order to address the continuing increase of classified information, positions, and systems needed to protect classified data, I will reintroduce legislation titled the "Clearance and Over-Classification Reform and Reduction Act" or "CORRECT Act."

While the CORRECT Act addresses government-wide security clearance processes, in order to advance more focused legislation, I also introduced H.R. 3505, "Department of Homeland Security Clearance Management and Administration Act,"

This act makes specific classification reforms within the Department of Homeland Security.

Subsequently, that bill has passed our Committee and the House with bipartisan support.

If enacted, H.R. 3505 would make DHS a leader among Federal agencies with respect to security clearance and position designations practices.

I believe that access to national security information is a privilege that should be regarded with the highest integrity and it is important for the Department to be good stewards of this information by managing and monitoring its workforce and data.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today regarding the best practices and considerations undertaken to further the programs directed at counterintelligence and insider threats to the Department of Homeland Security and its personnel."

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