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

Examining Physical Security and Cybersecurity at Our Nation's Ports

October 30, 2017

Earlier today, we had the opportunity to tour and be briefed about both the Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The scope of the operations by the ports and their Federal, state, and local partners is impressive, as is the magnitude of the security challenges facing the ports.

At the same time, the ports are vitally important to trade and commerce not just locally, but across the country and around the globe. Indeed, the bulk of U.S. overseas trade is carried by ships, many of which call on the ports we are discussing today. The economic consequences of a maritime terrorist attack could be catastrophic to the country, in addition to the potential loss of life and property.

Unfortunately, port security sometimes gets short shrift when it comes to allocating scarce Federal security resources. I would argue that rather than spending billions on a border wall, for example, we should invest in better securing our ports by strengthening their physical security, providing appropriate Customs and Border Protection officer staffing, and enhancing cyber defenses.

With respect to staffing, the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), which represents frontline CBP officers at our ports, reports there currently nearly 1,500 CBP officer vacancies and an additional 2,000 CBP officers are needed to properly secure our ports while facilitating travel. This shortage of 3,500 officers is unacceptable. It puts the security of our ports in jeopardy and slows valuable commerce.

Coast Guard resources are similarly strained. For instance, the Commandant of the Coast Guard has stated there were over 500 smuggling events last year about which the Coast Guard had information but was unable to respond to due to a lack of assets. Again, this is unacceptable.

With respect to cybersecurity, Reps. Barragan and Correa have raised before the Committee a major cyber-attack that occurred in June of this year at the port of Los Angeles. AP Moller-Maersk had to shut down its container operations, costing the company as much as \$300 million and causing weeks of disrupted operations. I look forward to hearing from our panel about the lessons learned, the precautions put in place since that incident, and what more remains to be done.

We should be putting our scarce resources toward addressing these gaps in our Nation's security. I hope we can address all of these important issues today and that we can continue to work together to enhance the security of our Nation's ports.

In closing, I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today and all the men and women who keep these ports operating securely and efficiently for the benefit of local communities and our entire country.

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