

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Enhancing Preparedness and Response Capabilities to Address Cyber Threats***

May 24, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee and Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies subcommittee joint hearing entitled “Enhancing Preparedness and Response Capabilities to Address Cyber Threats”:

“Over the past 15 years, the nation has experienced man-made and natural disasters that caused damage beyond our expectations and overwhelmed the response capabilities of the impacted communities. After each disaster – from the 9/11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina to the Boston Marathon bombings and Hurricane Sandy – we take the lessons learned and adjust the response plans so that we are better prepared for the next version of the same event.

Preparing to respond to those kinds of events has become almost routine. We assess terror threats and the potential for various natural disasters. We conduct vulnerability assessments of our communities, and we hone, train, and exercise our disaster response plans. The doctrine guiding how we prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from more conventional disasters is well-established and incorporates important lessons learned from past events.

Unfortunately, national guidance of a similar caliber is lacking for a response to a cyber attack. When I am home in Mississippi, local emergency managers tell me that roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined for a cyber response and that the statutory authority for the Federal government to render aid to affected States is murky at best.

We need to do better. The frequency of cyber attacks is increasing and the attacks are becoming more sophisticated. I fear a Cyber Katrina if we do not establish a “whole community approach” to prevent, respond to, and recover from cyber attacks soon, before hackers disable part of the electric grid, gain control of one of our transit systems, or infiltrate our water treatment facilities.

Addressing the growing cyber threat and equipping emergency managers with the tools they need to effectively respond to disasters triggered by hackers will require at least three changes.

First, we have to improve information sharing. Second, we have to improve communication among the emergency response community and non-traditional response partners, including private-sector infrastructure owners and chief information officers. Third, we have to do a better job defining roles, responsibilities, and authorities related to a cyber response.

Late last year, the House of Representatives took an important step advancing those objectives by passing H.R. 3878, the Strengthening Cybersecurity Information Sharing and Coordination in Our Ports Act.

Introduced by Congresswoman Torres, H.R. 3878 would improve information sharing and cooperation in addressing cybersecurity risks at our nation’s ports by directing DHS to establish voluntary guidelines for reporting of cybersecurity risks, implement a maritime cyber security risk model, and make recommendations on enhancing the sharing of cyber information.

The legislation also directs the Coast Guard to ensure area maritime security and facility security plans address cybersecurity risks. H.R. 3878, along with several other important pieces of cybersecurity legislation from this Committee, has passed the House is currently pending in the Senate. I urge our

Senate colleagues to act on these bills before the summer recess.

In the meantime, I am eager to learn from our witnesses about existing challenges in developing response plans for cyber events and what the Federal government can do to help.”

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>