



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“An Overview of Department of Homeland Security Federal Advisory Committees”

July 25, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “An Overview of Department of Homeland Security Federal Advisory Committees”:

“The Department has 29 Federal advisory committees, 19 subcommittees, the equivalent of 33 Federal support staff, and nearly 500 members drawn from both the public and private sector. To support these Committees, the Department spent approximately \$6 million in Fiscal Year 2006 and plans to spend approximately \$8 million in FY 2007.

This may not seem like a great deal of money. However, as the authorizing committee for this Department, we must ask-- what do the American people get for the dollars that have been spent?

And I am sorry to report that the answer to that question is unclear. Advisory committees have been around for many years. These committees can be a good thing.

Advisory Committees allow members of the public to express their opinions on policies that will affect the way in which they go about their daily lives. Advisory Committees also include representatives from the private sector. It is no secret that the policies put forth by the Department have an effect not only on how the private sector conducts business but on the profitability of those businesses. Advisory Committees provide a seat at the table to those who will be affected by the decisions that are made by the government. And that is what representative government should do.

However, the beneficial function of these committees is meaningless if the Department does not listen to them. The good ideas that may be born in these committees are useless if there is no way to track them.

The objectivity of these committees is compromised if their composition is not both balanced and diverse. It is up to the Department to assure that people who serve on these committees will be heard, their recommendations considered, and their ideas received with openness.

And it is up to the Department to assure this Congress that there is transparency in the process, accountability in the result and that conflicts of interest do not pervade their operation. I am not convinced that these goals are being met.”

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