

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“The Grades are In! — Is the Department of Homeland Security Measuring Up?”**

September 18, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The Grades are In! — Is the Department of Homeland Security Measuring Up?”:

“On September 6, 2007, a day after the House Committee on Homeland Security held a hearing examining Secretary Chertoff’s record at the Department of Homeland Security, GAO publicly released its report assessing the Department’s progress over the past four (4) years.

GAO examined legislation, Homeland Security Presidential Directives, and DHS and component agencies’ strategic plans.

GAO assessed the Department’s performance based on its Inspector General’s reports, past GAO reports, and documents provided by the Department.

All in all, GAO found that the key underlying themes that have affected the Department’s implementation efforts are the lack of strategic planning and management, risk management, information sharing, agency transformation, partnership formation and internal and external coordination.

Simply put, the GAO report confirmed what I and this Committee have suspected for a while now – That is the Department has failed to complete major projects, programs, and plans critical to fulfilling critical homeland security missions.

In addition to incomplete performance in several operational and programmatic areas, I am also troubled about the Department’s on-going challenges in resolving critical personnel vacancies that exist in key decision-making positions.

The GAO report is really pointing to a need for accountability.

Mr. Schneider, it did not go unnoticed that the Department chose to send you to defend the Department’s four year record when you have only been in your post for nine months.

It should be noted that the Committee sought the attendance of Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson, who has been at the Department since its inception, and who serves as the Department’s chief operating officer and is responsible for managing the Department’s day-to-day operations.

Let me state emphatically that the Department must not evade its responsibility to the American people.

The leaders of the Department should be here to account for why they have decided to swap the National Response Plan for a National Response Framework that state and local participants are still confused about.

The decision makers of the Department must account for the 300 percent cost increase of the

SBlNet – a program the Department said would help to secure the borders against dangerous persons and cargo.

The managers of the Department should account for the delay in the issuance of TWIC – the transportation worker identification card.

The directors of the Department need to account for the fact that taxpayer dollars were spent on the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) - a program that the Department's Inspector General found does not support information sharing effectively, does not fully meet user needs, and in many cases is not relied upon by State, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies.

Now I understand that the Department questions the methodology employed by GAO in compiling its assessment of DHS.

Mr. Schneider, I am prepared to hear the Department's concerns about the GAO but I must warn you that the Department's failure to accomplish its responsibilities to the American people is hardly due to statistical manipulation.

The fact is that at the September 5th hearing, I gave Secretary Chertoff a list of outstanding projects that he is to complete before his tenure is over at the Department.

When all of the items on the list have been accomplished then the American people will be able to say that we are safer now than we were before.

I will close by saying - once again – that we owe the American people security. We owe them accountability. And most importantly, we owe them freedom from fear.”

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://homeland.house.gov>