

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson
“Assessing the Framework and Coordination of the
National Emergency Communications Plan”**

July 15, 2008 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Communication, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee hearing entitled “Assessing the Framework and Coordination of the National Emergency Communications Plan”:

“This morning’s hearing – which is an examination of the National Emergency Communications Plan – kicks off a series of hearings by the Committee on Homeland Security to evaluate the Department of Homeland Security’s progress in carrying out the mandates in the “Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act,” or the 9/11 Act.

Improving the Nation’s emergency communications capabilities is one of my 8-point priorities that I have articulated for this Committee and, indeed, the Department of Homeland Security. As a former firefighter, I can personally attest to how important communications are to first responders during emergencies.

It can mean the difference between life and death.

It is deeply unsettling that even after the devastating Oklahoma bombing, the 9-11 attacks, the London and Madrid bombings, and the catastrophic devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that interoperable communications is still elusive.

It is unforgivable that after the clear instructions that Congress gave the Department in the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act in 2006 and then again in the 9/11 Act, DHS - and indeed, this Administration - consistently fails to prioritize emergency communications.

Emergency responders at all levels of governments cite the ability to communicate as the most basic function of any response and recovery effort. Yet, DHS has missed a critical deadline of delivering the NECP – which was due to Congress in April 2008.

Congress was very specific in saying that States and localities could not use the Interoperable Emergency Communication Grant Program until the NECP was completed. States and local governments are anxiously waiting for these funds which are supposed to be allocated by September 30th.

What should have been a hearing to congratulate the Department – in particular the Office of Emergency Communications – for its completion of the NECP, has taken an unfortunate turn. Instead, the Department has left Congress, representatives from the State and local governments, the first responder community, and the private sector all waiting for the plan.

So today we find ourselves, without so much as an executive summary of the potential national framework to explain this crucial requirement of the 9/11 Act. I can only say that this Nation deserves better and I certainly hope that the failure of the Department to meet this deadline is not indicative of a pattern that will repeat itself during this month’s hearings.”

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