



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Practicing Like We Play: Examining Homeland Security Exercises”

October 3, 2007 (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 “Practicing Like We Play: Examining Homeland Security Exercises”:

“The process of planning and conducting exercises is very critical to enhancing our Nation’s emergency preparedness. However, what is even more important is gathering and disseminating the lessons learned and making sure that all of the players take action to correct any shortcomings that were exposed during the exercise.

Over two years ago, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana and in my home state of Mississippi. However, a year prior to that FEMA and the State of Louisiana conducted an exercise called Hurricane Pam, which should have provided insight into the challenges we would face in the wake of a storm the size of Katrina.

Hurricane Pam brought sustained winds of 120 miles per hour, up to 20 inches of rain, and a storm surge that topped levees in the New Orleans area. More than one million residents were forced to be evacuated and Hurricane Pam destroyed over 500,000 buildings. However, the exercise scenario did not raise loud enough alarm bells throughout our Federal government that we needed to act quickly to enhance our ability to respond to this type of disaster.

Going forward we need to have a robust program to quickly implement lessons learned from exercises at all levels of government. I look forward to hearing from Mr. Schrader how the “New FEMA” is ensuring that this is happening.

I also look forward to hearing from the National Guard about how they are coordinating and integrating with DHS and our local first responders to conduct effective exercises. The Guard will play a substantial role in a response to an act of terrorism or a large natural disaster and they need to be fully integrated into our national exercises. Finally, the large TOPOFF exercises have received mixed reviews since they started back in 2000.”

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or Todd Levett at (202) 225-9978