

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

"Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grants: Are the Departments of Homeland Security and Commerce Effectively Coordinating to Meet our Nation's Emergency Communications Needs?"

March 14, 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 "Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grants: Are the Departments of Homeland Security and Commerce Effectively Coordinating to Meet our Nation's Emergency Communications Needs?":

"At the February 9th hearing before the Full Committee, I had to remind Secretary Chertoff that both the Departments of Homeland Security and Commerce were remiss in completing an MOU outlining how the interoperability grant program was going to be administered.

As you know, Congress authorized the billion dollar interoperability grant program as part of the 2006 Deficit Reduction Act. Specifically, the act directed the Department of Commerce to consult with the Department of Homeland Security about how to administer the program.

The good news is that the Office of Grants and Training at DHS and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) finally signed an MOU regarding the interoperability grant program on February 16, 2007.

Now, I could dwell on the fact that the MOU was supposed to have been completed by September 30, 2006. I could also harp on the fact that the delay in the coordination of the grant program defied two Acts of Congress and the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. Just as well, I could nag the witnesses about the fact that first responders were left in limbo while Federal agencies and departments were doing their jurisdictional dance.

But, the ability to communicate during times of emergency is too important. You see, as a volunteer firefighter for 26 years, I know that if first responders cannot talk, then lives will be lost.

So with that Mr. Chairman, I want to hear from the witnesses how they have worked out the details to ensure proper coordination between the two Departments to address the interoperable communication needs of our Nation's emergency responders.

We cannot afford to delay any further. The lack of interoperable communications contributed to the loss of life on September 11, 2001 and during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.”

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