



**One Hundred Tenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

July 11, 2007

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

Over the past five years, tens of billions of taxpayer dollars have been dedicated to standing up and building capacity at the Department of Homeland Security. The Department of Homeland Security is charged with deterring, preventing and responding to the threat of terrorism. To that end, systems have been erected to identify risks and communicate them to the American public. With all the resources you have at your disposal and all the progress that you assure us that you are making, I cannot understand why you are quoted in the Chicago Tribune as saying you have a “gut feeling” that we are entering a period of heightened risk this summer.

Words have power, Mr. Secretary. You must choose them wisely—especially when they relate to the lives and security of the American public. What color code in the Homeland Security Advisory System is associated with a “gut feeling”? What sectors should be on alert as a result of your “gut feeling”? What cities should be asking their law enforcement to work double shifts because of your “gut feeling”? Are the American people supposed to purchase duct tape and plastic sheeting because of your “gut feeling”?

The Committee on Homeland Security has repeatedly emphasized the importance of getting specific, actionable information to our first preventers in law enforcement and other emergency response providers. I urge you to follow up on your “gut feeling” and share whatever information our nation’s first preventers need to be on alert and prepared. Otherwise, we run the risk of communities taking it upon themselves to mobilize for every possible threat. This not only would result in communities depleting their scarce homeland security resources but runs contrary to your efforts to move toward a risk-based approach to homeland security.

This fall, we will be marking the sixth anniversary of the most deadly terrorist attack on U.S. soil. With likely action on legislation to implement the unfinished business of the 9/11 Commission, Congress is poised to give you more and better opportunities to work with law enforcement in a constructive manner.

Mr. Secretary, I urge you to clarify your comments by providing concrete direction to the State, local and tribal stakeholders and if necessary make the required changes to the Nation’s threat level to ensure that the American public can take the necessary steps to protect their families, businesses and communities.

July 11, 2007

Page 2

I would be happy to convene a classified briefing of our Members to discuss the threat to our nation if you believe that such a briefing is warranted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman