

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Diversity at DHS: Keeping Pace or Missing the Mark?”

May 21, 2008 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Diversity at DHS: Keeping Pace or Missing the Mark?”:

“I am told that some people may question why this committee is examining the Department’s workforce diversity.

In response to those concerns, I want to read the following quote:

‘Research shows that organizations employing an effective diversity strategy based on the concepts of inclusion and respect for differences, enhance their creative problem solving, organizational flexibility and mission effectiveness.’

While I agree with those words, they are not my words. The words were contained in a June 2007 report on the Department’s Diversity Initiative that was issued by Marta Brito-Perez, former Chief Human Capital Officer at the Department of Homeland Security. Within 6 months after issuing this report, Ms. Brito-Perez left the Department.

In March 2008, Majority Committee staff issued a report examining diversity in the Senior Executive and Leadership ranks of the Department. With few exceptions, that report found that the Department lagged behind other federal agencies in its representation of women and minorities in the Senior Executive Service.

In April 2008, the Acting Chief Human Capital Officer testified at a joint hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee and the House Committee on Government Oversight.

He stated that while DHS had formed a Diversity Council, it still had not issued a Corporate Diversity Strategy or implemented a Diversity Action Plan for the remainder of FY2008 through FY2010.

Since Ms. Brito-Perez’s report, several disturbing incidents have occurred at the Department. Racially offensive emails were sent among 20 supervisors at the Secret Service. A noose was found in the gear of an African American Coast Guard cadet. And an ICE employee wore skin darkening make-up and prison garb to a Halloween party.

I cannot say that the inclusion of diversity in the upper ranks of this Department would

have prevented these incidents. And I cannot say that the lack of diversity caused these incidents.

But I can say that there is a lack of diversity. I can say that these incidents happened. I can say that with only one exception, those who carried out these actions were not disciplined.

That leaves me to believe that this Department, our newest federal agency, has a long way to go toward becoming an organization that values inclusion and respects differences.

As Chairman of this Committee, my concern is that this lack of diversity coupled with low morale will hamper this Department's mission effectiveness.

And that is too high a price to pay. So today, we are meeting to examine workforce diversity at the Department.

Because more than anything, we want the Department to be able to tap into the kind of creative problem-solving, organizational flexibility and mission effectiveness that are hallmarks of organizations that employ effective diversity strategies."

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