

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Challenges Facing First Responders in Border Communities”**

July 12, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing entitled “Challenges Facing First Responders in Border Communities”:

“Communities along both the northern and southern border of the United States remain vulnerable to threats from the drug trade, human trafficking, increased crime and violence, and health risks. We understand all too well the threats posed by terrorists at our land, air and sea ports of entry.

While this Committee has focused a lot of much-needed attention on lack of resources and management plaguing our customs and border protection efforts, we have not focused enough attention on the burdens placed on our local law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical service personnel along the border.

Whether it is interoperable communications, intelligence and information sharing, or emergency planning, these communities have unique requirements and face additional hazards that we must address.

It appears that the Department is beginning to understand this reality. A State or urban area’s proximity to the border is now a major factor used by the Department to determine risk as part of the homeland security grants process. As a result, the cities of Tucson, Arizona and El Paso, Texas were added to the list of cities eligible for UASI grants in FY 2007.

Besides hearing from the witnesses about the funding challenges they face, I am also interested to hear about how they work with public safety agencies on the other side of the border. Pre-standing mutual aid agreements, robust cross-border training and exercise programs, and health preparedness planning are critical to mount an effective emergency response.

Finally, I am pleased to see we have representation from the tribal community at this hearing. Many tribes have lands that are close to or cross over international boundaries with Mexico or Canada. They are often overlooked when it comes to both homeland security grant funding and emergency planning.”

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