

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“An Examination of the President’s FY 2008 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security”

February 9, 2007 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee Hearing entitled “An Examination of the President’s FY 2008 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security”:

“Last February, when you appeared before this Committee to discuss the Administration’s FY 2007 budget, the entire Nation was disgusted with the atrocious response to Hurricane Katrina. Confidence in FEMA and the overall Department was at an all-time low. The Department proposed drastic cuts to programs that assist our first responders who are on the front lines of the “war on terror,” here at home. And funding for the security of mass transit, rail, and critical infrastructure were enormously shortchanged by your Department’s budget.

Many concluded that the Nation was not ready to handle a catastrophic terrorist attack or natural disaster.

Today, the Committee is reviewing the Department’s FY 2008 budget proposal – a budget which you state will: Protect the nation from dangerous people and goods; Protect critical infrastructure; Improve emergency preparedness and response; and, Improve the operations and management of the Department.

Well, this may be a new year, but in some instances it feels like déjà vu.

Now, I do recognize some significant increases in areas such as Cybersecurity and border security. Unfortunately, I fear that behind the “increases” - lurk more problems than answers.

For example, the budget requests \$31 million to add an additional 600 detention beds for FY 2008. But it seems that DHS is working against itself. Yes, the Administration has only recently decided to step up its worksite enforcement. However, where are the bed spaces to house the undocumented immigrants?

Just last week, I saw the reports of the “tent city” nicknamed “Ritmo” set up in Raymondville, Texas. I can assure you this Committee will be looking into this matter further.

Also, I am concerned that the proposed budget for the Department does not adequately address why DHS ranked last or near the bottom – for the second time – in every category of the OPM Employee Satisfaction Survey.

Mr. Secretary, I am concerned that this proposed budget is passing the buck of homeland security to state and local agencies.

Once again, the President’s budget would eliminate funding for the Local Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP). This year’s budget would cut 52% from the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP), which provides grants to first responders in all fifty states and U.S. territories. The firefighter’s grant program (FIRE Act) would be cut by nearly 50%. First responders training grants would be slashed by 55%. And, the President’s budget would zero out funding for metropolitan medical systems that need to improve their preparedness to respond to mass casualties from a disaster, like the pandemic flu.

As I have said to you before, millions of lives are at stake and we cannot continue to protect the homeland “on the cheap” or through contracted services.

One last note, I am personally very disappointed that you are zeroing out the Minority Serving Institution research and fellowship program. As we have discussed on numerous occasions, the Department must absolutely reaching out to MSI’s to assure that our homeland security efforts mirror America and its citizens. This elimination does not show a commitment to doing so.”

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