

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape

July 25, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape”:

“As we meet today to consider the homeland threat landscape, we must be mindful that yesterday, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq issued a videotaped message indicating his intention to carry out attacks within the United States. These new threats require an assessment of our ability to meet our known challenges and address our known vulnerabilities.

According to The New York Times, this nation has spent about \$360 billion on homeland security since September 1, 2001. But despite this amount of spending we have not filled all the gaps. I think most people would agree that we have made some gains. Aviation security, border security, disaster response, and information sharing activities have been improved. For the most part, these improvements in security have not required us to surrender the constitutional rights and protections that are the cornerstone of this nation’s freedom. This nation cannot sacrifice security or freedom in the face of any threat—foreign or domestic.

As we look back at the last eleven years, we have greatly decreased this nation’s vulnerability to attack. I would be remiss if I did not mention that this Administration’s actions abroad, from eliminating the threat posed by Bin Laden to shifting our military presence, have also contributed to decreasing our vulnerability at home.

However, we must be candid. Some vulnerabilities remain and the nature of the threat continues to evolve. As we consider this evolution process, we must first focus on the nature of the terrorist actor. The most recent incidents in this country have involved the lone wolf actor who is ideologically motivated to commit violent acts. We must accept that we will not be able to find every lone wolf bent on terror. But we cannot accept that we are powerless to close opportunities and remove the instrumentalities of destruction.

As I stated at a hearing last week, we should not forget that in the United States the last person to crash a plane into a federal building, fueled by an anti-government ideology, was a pilot in Texas. GAO has reported and the Department has testified that we do not check Americans seeking flight training against the terrorist watchlist until they apply for a pilot’s license. The lesson of 9/11 is that we need to keep people who seek to do us harm from being trained as pilots. We must remove the opportunities and the instrumentalities of destruction. I have introduced a bill that would require everyone who is seeking to be trained as pilot is vetted against a terrorist watchlist. I hope my colleagues will join me in that effort.

As we consider the vulnerabilities that remain, I am disappointed that we have not yet managed to achieve the screening of 100% of maritime cargo that reaches our shores. Madame Secretary, it is my understanding that you have recently signed a blanket two-year waiver of the 100%

screening requirement. I do not understand how the Department can ignore a statutory mandate designed to close a known vulnerability. Searching the cargo before it reaches this country provides us with the best opportunity to remove instrumentalities of destruction before they reach this country.

Finally, as we consider threats and vulnerabilities, we must also think about likely targets. GAO has produced several reports highlighting the poor state of federal building security. And while promises have been made, little has changed. I hope we have not forgotten that a lone wolf terrorist blew up a federal building in Oklahoma several years before the events of September 11th. Timothy McVeigh used his opportunity and created destruction. We do not need to see this happen again before we take action.

In closing, as we begin today's discussion about the homeland threat landscape, I look forward to hearing about how we can move away from merely identifying the problems and move toward finding and implementing solutions."

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