

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Using Unmanned Aerial Systems Within the Homeland:
Security Game Changer?***

July 19, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Oversight, Investigations, and Management subcommittee hearing entitled “Using Unmanned Aerial Systems Within the Homeland: Security Game Changer?”:

“In February, President Obama signed the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act into law.

Included in the Act was a provision directing the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), to rapidly expand the ability of public agencies – including State and local law enforcement – to use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or UAVs, to fulfill their missions.

The use of UAVs within the homeland is not a new concept.

Following Hurricane Katrina, UAVs played a vital role in surveying storm-damaged communities and assisting in the search and rescue of trapped survivors in Mississippi and other areas affected by the storm.

Moreover, since 2004, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), within the Department of Homeland Security has deployed UAVs along the Southwestern Border as a force-multiplier in its border security efforts.

CBP recently announced its intention to increase its fleet of 10 UAVs to 24 by the year 2016.

Clearly, UAVs have many beneficial uses in the national airspace and, when used within proper parameters, can serve as an important tool in securing the homeland.

However, the use of UAVs in our national airspace may be expanding at a faster rate than the legal protections governing its use.

In late 2010, there were 273 active government-licensed UAVs, nearly 100 more than the previous year. Reports in 2012 demonstrate that the FAA has issued more than 300 UAV licenses.

Yet, according to the Government Accountability Office, “no federal agency has specific statutory responsibility to regulate privacy matters related to UAVs.”

Despite the Department of Homeland Security’s role as the leading federal agency operating UAVs, its Chief Privacy Officer has never performed a Privacy Impact Assessment on UAVs or developed safeguards and guidelines for ensuring that privacy protections are in place.

Furthermore, although FAA is responsible for incorporating UAVs into our national airspace, according to its website: “the FAA’s sole mission and authority as it focuses on the integration of unmanned aircraft systems is safety.”

So, who is watching the henhouse, with respect to privacy? That is the question that causes me concern.

UAVs are capable of hovering in the same spot for up to 30 hours and recent reports indicate that in the near future, 45 hours is not out of the question.

They can find and follow a single target or up to 65; utilize facial recognition software to find a face in a

crowd or an event; read license plates from the sky; and some can even shoot taser projectiles, tear gas and rubber balls from 300 hundred feet above ground.

Given these capabilities, there is the potential for invasive surveillance and warrantless searches with little to no privacy protections in place.

Like my colleagues, I strongly support providing homeland security officials and law enforcement agencies with the tools they need to carry out their vital work on behalf of our Nation.

However, we have a responsibility to ensure that as technology develops and our systems become more sophisticated proper safeguards and protections are in place to ensure the right to privacy is maintained.”

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