



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Protecting the Maritime Borders – Leveraging Law Enforcement Cooperation to Enhance Security Along America’s Coasts

July 12, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Protecting the Maritime Borders – Leveraging Law Enforcement Cooperation to Enhance Security Along America’s Coasts”:

“Often when Congress examines the issue of border security, the focus is limited to the land border and the southwest border in particular. Meaningful discussion about border security must also include America’s maritime borders.

Our nation has thousands of miles of coastlines, lakes, and rivers and hundreds of ports that provide opportunities for legitimate travel, trade, and recreation.

At the same time, these waterways offer opportunities for terrorists and their instruments, drug smugglers, and undocumented persons to enter our country.

I am pleased that today the Subcommittee is examining maritime security and how law enforcement agencies can work cooperatively to combat these threats.

The Department of Homeland Security, including the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection, is at the forefront of this effort.

I look forward to hearing from our DHS witnesses about how CBP and Coast Guard coordinate their maritime security operations to help secure our Nation while avoiding duplication of efforts in an arena with multiple law enforcement agencies.

Given the magnitude of the task and our relatively limited federal resources, DHS cooperation and coordination with state, local, and international partners is essential.

Resource limitations often pose a challenge for state and local participation in maritime security efforts, however.

State and local governments frequently lack adequate funding to deploy the personnel and vessels necessary to operate in the maritime environment.

Unfortunately, the House-passed fiscal year 2012 Homeland Security Appropriations bill makes significant cuts to grant programs that assist state and local law enforcement. Specifically, the bill would cut grants for State and Local Programs by \$1.23 billion (-55.2%) when compared to the FY 2011 enacted level, or \$2.1 billion (-67.7%) below the President’s request.

These cuts, if enacted, would undermine local law enforcement’s maritime security efforts.

For example, in places like Harris County, Texas, represented by Sheriff Garcia on our witness panel, these cuts could have serious consequences for their ability to help ensure the security of the Houston Ship Channel, which is home to numerous petrochemical facilities.

Similarly, as Sheriff Donnellon points out in his testimony, Operation Stonegarden has been essential to his

ability to deploy officers in his community.

Cutting these grant funds would undermine the good work being done in communities along both borders.

While many members on the other side of the aisle talk tough on security issues, they fail to put their money where their mouths are when it comes to grant funding. In fact, they voted overwhelmingly in favor of these cuts – including the Chairman of this Subcommittee.

State and local governments are becoming adept at doing more with less, but you can only cut so much before homeland security begins to suffer.

I look forward to hearing from our local law enforcement witnesses about their work in the maritime security mission, as well what effect these proposed grant funding cuts may have on their efforts.”

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