



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson**

### ***Mark-Up of H.R. 1517, H.R. 2611, H.R. 3239, H.R. 3837, H.R. 3963, H.R. 3978, H.R. 3980, and H.Res. 28***

November 17, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup of H.R. 1517, H.R. 2611, H.R. 3239, H.R. 3837, H.R. 3963, H.R. 3978, H.R. 3980, and H.Res. 28:

“Today, we are here to consider eight measures that will enhance our Nation’s ability to respond, at all levels of government, to the terrorist threat. Taken together, these bills touch each and every community in the country and will enhance the Department of Homeland Security’s operations.

The first bill that we will consider is H.R. 3837, a bill that seeks to ensure that highly-technical equipment purchased with Homeland Security grant funds can be maintained.

I want to commend the gentlelady from Ohio, Ms. Kilroy, for diligently working to produce this important legislation that will restore FEMA policy governing the use of grant funds.

On September 22nd, FEMA inexplicably announced that grantees could no longer use future homeland security grant money to maintain and sustain vital homeland security equipment.

This represented a major about-face on the longstanding policy of allowing grantees to use these funds to pay for ongoing equipment maintenance costs.

In fact, the FEMA grant guidance for fiscal years 2008 and 2009 encouraged grantees to explain how they would use grant funding to sustain equipment that had been previously purchased.

In these tough economic times, this FEMA policy change risks putting critical national capabilities in jeopardy, if grantees cannot use homeland security funds to maintain WMD, interoperable communications, and other counter-terrorism equipment.

Two related bills that we will be considering today were introduced by the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee respectively.

H.R. 3980, as introduced by Mr. Cuellar, would eliminate redundant grant and preparedness reporting requirements on State, local, and tribal governments reporting requirements and H.R. 3978, as introduced by Mr. Rogers, would enhance the operations at DHS’ Center on Domestic Preparedness. I strongly support both bills.

Additionally, we will be addressing some unfinished business from consideration of the Transportation Security Administration Authorization bill that we moved earlier this year.

Specifically, we will be considering H.R. 3963, as introduced by Mr. Lungren, which would allow Federal Air Marshals to enhance their capabilities by receiving criminal investigative training and H.Res. 28, as introduced by Ms. Jackson-Lee, which shines a light on the need for enhanced security in the rail and mass transit environment.

Turning to border security, H.R. 1517, as introduced by Mr. Engel and Ranking Member King,

would correct a longstanding classification problem among a small group of Customs and Border personnel that were hired before DHS was created. These 35 people are working overseas, mostly in Ireland, and need to be properly classified as CBP staff.

To ensure proper oversight of the Merida Initiative, we will be considering H.R. 3239, legislation authored by the gentlelady from Arizona, Ms. Kirkpatrick.

Finally, we will be considering H.R. 2611, a bill introduced by the Ranking Member, Mr. King, which would make the Secure the Cities program permanent to ensure that this WMD-detection program, which has operated since 2006, will continue.

All eight of these bills have my support and are responsive to specific homeland security challenges.”

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