



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

The Role of Unmanned Aerial Systems in Border Security

July 15, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing entitled *The Role of Unmanned Aerial Systems in Border Security*:

"Last week I visited Arizona, where I heard firsthand from residents about the need to do more to secure America's southwest border. So, it is particularly fitting this hearing is being held today.

Along with providing appropriate personnel and infrastructure, deploying effective technology is an essential part of the Department's border and maritime security efforts. I am interested in hearing more today about how Unmanned Aerial Systems (UASs) can assist Customs and Border Protection and the Coast Guard in that regard.

At the same time, we know that this technology can be utilized in disaster response, such as the recent Deepwater Horizon oil spill. It is my understanding that DHS's UAS assets have been tasked with providing aerial images from the Gulf in the wake of the spill.

Like my colleagues, I strongly support providing the men and women of DHS with the tools they need to carry out their vital work on behalf of our Nation. However, I have some questions for our panel.

Today, I hope to hear specifics about how UASs can help CBP and the Coast Guard to fulfill their missions. Technology is intended to be a force-multiplier. Given the cost of this technology, we should have a clear understanding of what the American taxpayers are getting for their money.

I also hope to hear about some of the challenges CBP and Coast Guard face in deploying UASs along our borders and shores, and how we might be of assistance. For example, there has been a great deal of concern about the length of time it takes DHS to obtain a Certificate of Authorization to fly UASs in the National Air Space. It is my understanding that process has improved of late, which is good to hear.

However, FAA and DHS must continue to work together to ensure that these COAs are issued in a timely manner, while still ensuring the safety of our air space. CBP has also reported that a shortage of qualified UAS pilots is a persistent problem given the demand for such pilots in the military and elsewhere.

If funding is provided for additional UASs, this pilot shortage must be addressed. To the extent that Congress can be helpful in overcoming these challenges, we certainly want to do so.

Both CBP and Coast Guard intend to expand their UAS programs significantly in the coming years. It is imperative that they do so in a way that makes the most of our limited homeland security resources. Certainly, the American people, and border community residents in particular, expect no less."

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