

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****Markup: H.R. 1413, H.R. 1717, H.R. 1955**

August 1, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup for H.R. 1413, “To direct the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security (Transportation Security Administration) to address vulnerabilities in aviation security by carrying out a pilot program to screen airport workers with access to secure and sterile areas of airports”; H.R. 1717, “To amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to establish a National Bio and Agro-defense Facility”; and H.R. 1955, “To Amend the “Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007” :

“We are here to consider three bipartisan bills that were authored by Members of this Committee. Each addresses a different homeland security challenge— Aviation security; Agro-terrorism; and Radicalization. Common to all three bills is a commitment to “study” and develop solutions for how to make America more secure.

The first bill, H.R. 1413, was introduced by Representatives Lowey and Brown-Waite to establish a pilot program to test the viability of physically screening airport workers at seven (7) airports. Consideration of H.R. 1413 is timely in light of recent news reports about workers being able to enter secure areas of the Phoenix airport after-hours, with little or no scrutiny.

Most airport workers are trustworthy individuals who are not a threat to the traveling public.

However, in a post-9/11 world, we have to address the risk of an “inside job”—where an attack is perpetrated or aided by an airport worker that exploits gaps in security. H.R. 1413 does just that. It does so in a way that takes into account the operational challenges of small airports and gives airports flexibility as to how they utilize their screening lanes.

Additionally, the Transportation Subcommittee accepted language offered by Mr. Lungren to direct the evaluation of alternative forms of screening, including: biometrics, behavior recognition, canine teams, and targeted physical screening. Under the leadership of Subcommittee Chairwoman Jackson-Lee, H.R. 1413 was “agreed to,” as amended, on April 24th by voice vote.

The second bill to be considered is H.R. 1717, a measure to establish a National Bio and Agro-defense Facility—the NBAF within DHS to research foreign animal diseases and biological threats.

The bill was introduced by Mr. McCaul and was approved by the Emerging Threats Subcommittee on June 6th. Diseases and other biological threats, both manmade and naturally-occurring, present a real danger to the health and economic security of the United States. A critical piece of our nation’s defenses against such threats is research.

For over 50 years, the Plum Island Animal Disease Center has served as this nation’s key research facility for foreign animal diseases. Both DHS and its partner in this research, the Department of Agriculture, agree that an upgraded facility is necessary. This is the reason that the NBAF, and this legislation to authorize it, are so important.

My Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute, which I will present in a few moments, improves on the underlying legislation in important ways. First, it makes clear that Congress expects DHS and USDA to work in partnership.

It requires the two Secretaries to develop a joint strategy for research at the new facility.

It also requires the two Secretaries to formalize their respective responsibilities in an interagency agreement. All activities at the NBAF will flow from that agreement, including the governance structure.

Through a permit granted by the Secretary of Agriculture, the NBAF will conduct research on the live virus of foot and mouth disease, which is currently not allowed on the U.S. mainland.

This research is crucial, as foot and mouth disease presents the largest economic threat to the U.S. livestock industry.

Earlier this month, DHS announced that the initial site selection process was completed, and that 5 sites have been selected as finalists.

Those sites are required to complete an Environmental Impact Statement before the final selection, and DHS needs the authority granted in this bill to ensure final completion of the process.

Over the past several months, the Committee has worked closely with the Committee on Agriculture, DHS, USDA, and several professional organizations to develop the amendment in the nature of a substitute that will be considered today. The amendment ensures that the interests of both DHS and USDA are protected and the security of the U.S. agriculture industry is enhanced.

The last bill we will be considering today was introduced by Representatives Harman and Reichert. H.R. 1955, the "Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act" acknowledges that the threat of violent radicalization in the United States is real and the sooner we understand the nature of the threat, the sooner we can act to prevent it.

The bill creates a National Commission to bring the best minds together to study the problem and develop concrete legislative strategies for eradicating violent radicalization in America.

The bill also establishes a "Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Radicalization and Home Grown Terrorism" to study the social, criminal, political, psychological, and economic roots of the problem.

It also directs our homeland security officials to examine the experiences of other nations with homegrown terrorism so that we can learn from them.

H.R. 1955, which was approved in the Intelligence Subcommittee on July 17th by voice vote, also takes measurable steps to protect civil rights by making sure that particular races, religions, or national origins are not targeted as a result of this legislation. Passage of this bipartisan bill, like the other two under consideration today, will help to make our nation more secure."

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