

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

### **Mismanagement, Missteps, and Missed Benchmarks: Why the Virtual Fence Has Not Become a Reality**

September 10, 2008 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Mismanagement, Missteps, and Missed Benchmarks: Why the Virtual Fence Has Not Become a Reality”:

“Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that tomorrow is the seventh anniversary of the September 11th attacks.

The three thousand people who lost their lives that Tuesday morning were hard-working Americans with families, friends, and neighbors just like the rest of us. They were going about their day with no idea of the terror that was to come.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to extend our heartfelt condolences.

As we reflect, let us not forget the heroism and bravery of our first responders.

The events of 9/11 forever changed our country, but we are a people resolved to live without fear.

That is why this Committee works so hard to ensure that our government is doing everything it can to secure the nation.

Today marks the fourth time in the 110th Congress that this Committee has held a hearing specifically to examine the Department of Homeland Security’s efforts to build a virtual fence across the southwest border.

I would especially like to thank Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee Chairwoman Loretta Sanchez and Management, Investigations, and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Christopher Carney for their work on this important issue.

Of course, using technology to secure our borders is not a new concept.

Over the last ten years, we have seen two other border technology programs – the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System (ISIS) and the American Shield Initiative (ASI) – come and go with few tangible results.

The third time, as they say, was supposed to be a charm.

Two years ago this month, the Department of Homeland Security awarded the SBInet contract to Boeing.

At that time, we were told that SBInet technology would be deployed along the southwest border in Tucson, El Paso, and Yuma by the end of 2008, to help the Border Patrol gain operational control of the southwest border.

We were also told that things would be different this time because the project would utilize “off-the-shelf” technology.

Since that time, the Department has awarded \$933.3 million in task orders for deployment of SBInet technology and infrastructure to its contractor, Boeing.

Regrettably, the partnership between DHS and Boeing has produced more missed deadlines and excuses than results.

The Department and Boeing have failed to deploy operational SBInet technology anywhere along the border, other than the so-called “prototype” known as Project 28.

And now, we are being told that the SBInet program is essentially on hold until next year.

It will become the 44th President’s problem.

I look forward to GAO’s testimony today, as I understand it will outline management deficiencies and other problems that GAO and this Committee cautioned DHS about from the start.

I am convinced that DHS and Boeing grossly underestimated the task of standing up SBInet.

That is simply unacceptable given the millions of dollars Congress has provided for SBInet and the opportunity DHS had to learn from previous mistakes.

Instead of the third time being a charm, this Administration may have just struck out.

DHS should reevaluate Boeing’s performance and continue to look to the innovation of this great country for border security technology.

Now is not the time to give up.

DHS must turn the page and heed the guidance from this Committee and the able staff at GAO, and chart a new path for the use of technology at the border.

It begins with DHS improving its own performance and implementing a better-planned border security technology system.

The stakes are simply too high to continue to fail to get it right.”

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