

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

Diversity at The Department of Homeland Security: Continuing Challenges and New Opportunities

October 14, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Diversity at The Department of Homeland Security: Continuing Challenges and New Opportunities”:

“I know and understand that the diversity challenges facing this Department were inherited not created by the current Administration. I do not place blame on you for creating the problems. But I am holding you responsible for delivering solutions.

This is the second hearing this Committee has held on this topic. Our first hearing focused on the lack of diversity within the Senior Executive Service. That hearing was prompted by a staff report which found that while racial minorities constituted 20% of the workforce, they are only 10% of the Senior Executive staff. In short, relatively few minorities rise to leadership levels at DHS.

Today, we will examine diversity among the employees who are the Department’s ‘boots on the ground.’ This population constitutes the majority of the agency’s workforce and is the ‘face of DHS’.

From data that the Department provided, it appears that challenges exist and are acute in several components. We have invited those components here today. But let me be clear. I am not interested in a numbers game. Creating a diverse workforce is not about simply creating ‘appropriate’ numerical ratios.

The many and varied homeland security challenges faced by this Department could be better addressed in an environment that values diversity.

We all know that people from diverse backgrounds are likely to have different life experiences. We are all enriched and informed by our life experiences.

Diversity values the perspectives these experiences can bring to an organization.

Solving problems, forming plans, and executing policies can all benefit in an environment that rejects a ‘one-size-fits all’ approach.

My hope is that diversity will replace the echo chamber of agreement with a true marketplace of ideas. The drive for diversity must be a quest to not only look like America but to think as freely as Americans.

This Department—the newest Federal agency—has an opportunity. And while this opportunity exists, it will not last long.

OPM predicts that a large percentage of the Federal workforce may retire within the next three years. The Partnership for Public Service found that 33% of this workforce are minorities and 43% are women. We are also told that the Department is likely to hire 65,000 new employees in the next three years.

There will be many workers leaving and many new workers coming onboard. This is the moment. Now is the time. If the Department does not figure out how to diversify its workforce, we run the risk that non-inclusive hiring patterns will be solidified.”

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