

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****The Secure Border Initiative: SBInet Three Years Later***

September 17, 2009 (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 Secure Border Initiative: SBInet Three Years Later*.

“Today’s hearing on the Secure Border Initiative comes at a very important time, as next week marks an anniversary of sorts for the Department of Homeland Security. On September 21, 2006, DHS awarded a contract to Boeing to help secure our nation’s borders. At the time, we were told that Boeing would be integrating existing, “off-the-shelf” technology to create a “virtual fence” along the borders, known as SBInet.

It was supposed to be a relatively easy project. Instead, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has repeatedly raised concerns about SBInet, including poor planning, insufficient testing, inadequate government oversight, and a failure to set and achieve project goals. Today, after spending nearly a billion dollars on the program, we are still waiting for an effective technological tool to secure America’s borders.

DHS and Boeing have had three years to show they can secure the border with technology.

It is my understanding that they will have at least one more year to do so, if the Department renews Boeing’s SBInet contract for an additional year, as expected. It is time to deliver some tangible results to the American people and this Congress.

I would like to know how DHS is going to ensure that when Boeing delivers the next phase of SBInet to the government early next year, taxpayers get their money’s worth.

Clearly, this Administration has inherited a serious challenge and has some difficult choices ahead. DHS either needs to get SBInet right or find an alternative technology solution that will do the job.

Along with technology, DHS has committed significant resources in recent years to constructing physical fencing along the southwest border. While there are currently over 600 miles of fence and vehicle barriers, according to GAO, the Department has not systematically evaluated the effectiveness of these barriers.

At a price tag of roughly \$2.4 billion and a potential life-cycle cost of \$6.5 billion, GAO’s finding is extremely troubling. Looking ahead, both DHS and Boeing have considerable ground to cover when it comes to deploying effective, efficient border security technology and infrastructure.

I hopeful this Administration can address many of the problems that have plagued this program and previous border security technology efforts. The witnesses can be assured that this Committee will continue to monitor the Secure Border Initiative closely.”

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