

# THE REAL DEAL FOR HOMELAND SECURITY

PLANNING, PREPARING AND PROTECTING OUR NATION

By Chairman Bennie G. Thompson, Committee on Homeland Security



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As Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, I know all too well that if we are going to make our nation safer, we need a partnership. Homeland security is neither a Democratic nor a Republican issue. It is an American issue. I plan to work closely with the Committee's Ranking Member – Peter King of New York – to ensure that it stays that way. Now, I might need a little help sometimes translating his Long Island talk into Mississippi speak and vice versa but in the end, I think we would agree that we both believe in DHS's mission and the need to get the agency up to speed. The homeland security challenges for us this Congress are many. But, above all, we must absolutely assure that our nation has planned, is prepared, and can protect our nation if an emergency occurs.

During President Roosevelt's inaugural address to the Nation on March 4, 1933, he quoted Proverbs 29:18 and said "where there is no vision, the people perish." Just as he sought to address a failing American economy through the New Deal, today I will provide you with an agenda that I hope will help us plan, prepare, and protect ... The Real Deal for Homeland Security.

The Real Deal requires us to move forward on many of the homeland security initiatives that have languished over the years. In furtherance of this, we started out the first 100 hours of Congress in January by overwhelmingly passing H.R. 1, a bill to implement the 9/11 recommendations.

I plan in the coming months to see stalled legislative initiatives move forward. Let me briefly address some of these. First, we cannot wait any longer to protect our nation's mass transit, rail, and bus security risks. Millions of people who live in our cities use these modes of transportation everyday. According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, more than 7.8 billion trips were taken on public transit in the first nine months of 2006. Yet, after Madrid, after London, after Mumbai, we do not have an adequate system in place to protect rail and mass transit.

My colleagues and I will introduce legislation next month that details specific steps that the Department must take to finally secure these vital systems. Our legislation will focus on vulnerability assessments and security plans, ways to share strategic information, the development of security training programs, and funding for various initiatives.

I also plan to hold the President to his word during the State of The Union to double the Border Patrol. We need to give the good men and women protecting our nation's borders the equipment, technology, and resources they need.

I plan to work to introduce legislation, if necessary, to improve intelligence and information sharing among the Federal Government and State, local, and tribal law enforcement. We simply cannot have a secure homeland if the officers who patrol our streets are not in the know on what to look for and who the terrorists are. We have to make sure, however, that we share information in a way that protects our privacy and civil liberties.

I think it is also important what we not forget April 19, 1995. It was on that day when homegrown terrorists attacked our heartland and Oklahoma City. I want to ensure that we are doing all we can to identify all extremist groups – domestic and international - that have designs on attacking fellow Americans or the Nation.

The Real Deal also requires us to listen to the needs of the people so that we never see our own citizens abandoned and betrayed by their government, as we did during Katrina and Rita. During the most trying times, aid comes from men and women in a variety of uniforms, including from our community's citizen soldiers in the National Guard. A Real Deal for homeland security means that the Guard must have the equipment and support needed to complete its missions around the world as well as just around the corner in our home towns.

To do so, we must listen to the locals throughout the country who know their needs and their communities, and not the bureaucrats in Washington. That means – listening to the cops, the firefighters and the EMTs when they say they need to be able to speak to one another.

We shouldn't – five years after 9/11- be so far behind on interoperability. Listening to the locals means holding the Department's feet to the fire on its reorganization of FEMA. To that effect, I plan to look at the decision to move the US-VISIT program as part of the reorganization. I'm troubled by assertions that it has been moved merely to put the program under a particular individual. Programs should be built around strong policies – not people. That is a lesson that Katrina and Michael Brown proved way too well.

An entire Gulf Coast is in need of rebuilding and it is going to take local talent to get it done. To this, the Real Deal can take a page from the New Deal.

My colleague Zoe Lofgren and I have discussed how a Civilian Conservation Corps. is needed for the Gulf Coast. I grew up on a street that was created as a result of the WPA, just like millions of other Americans. The CCC was critical to building our nation during

the New Deal. During the real deal, we need something similar for the Gulf Coast region. We are exploring how this can be done in a responsible and fiscally-responsible manner.

Lastly, The Real Deal requires us to conduct aggressive and meaningful oversight over a Department that has struggled to integrate 22 agencies into one. First, DHS needs to get its house in order. We will be looking closely at the agency's organizational and management structure, for one. And we will be looking at how it implements ongoing projects – especially those involving large sums of money and contractors.

We will be examining DHS' contracting practices and procedures and the role they play in planning, preparing and protecting our Nation. For example, we will take a close look at the Secure Border Initiative (SBI Net) and US-VISIT programs – two programs that are designed to secure our borders.

Speaking of the border, I also plan to revisit the “border fence” idea. Just last week I spoke to several border town mayors. These mayors – which included Republicans and Democrats - told me what a bad idea the fence would be for their communities. I plan to listen to these local concerns and examine whether Washington politicians and bureaucrats are doing the right thing by our border towns.

The Department's ability to respond to emerging threats requires the vision to anticipate, prioritize, and address those threats. We will be conducting oversight to assure that happens.

As we all know – our nation was built on ingenuity and innovative technology. We need to ensure that we keep building for the future. Our nation must use tomorrow's technology to fight tomorrow's terrorist attacks. To do that, we need a Science and Technology Directorate that has strong but smart leadership, a clearly defined vision, and prudent accounting. These elements will help improve morale, minimize turnover, secure institutional memory, and bolster a culture of responsibility within the Directorate and its many laboratories.

In addition, if we are going to build a technologically-advanced Department, we need to pull from institutions that look like America. I plan to develop centers of excellence at a variety of universities, including historically Black colleges and universities and Hispanic serving institutions.

I am also concerned about a pandemic flu or another anthrax threat. The Committee is going to examine Biowatch - a program at DHS that monitors, detects, and tracks biological agents.

The Committee will also take a critical look at our nation's Cybersecurity. In an interdependent and globally-connected world, protecting the networks that run our critical infrastructure, our financial institutions, and even our personal communications is of utmost importance.

Another step I have taken to assure that oversight is done properly is to realign the Committee's subcommittees. Each subcommittee needs focus and the ability to dig down into the issues that plague the Department. The revised structure, along with some outstanding chairs, should make sure that happens. The six subcommittees are as follows:

Border, Maritime & Global Counterterrorism, led by Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez;

Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment led by Congresswoman Jane Harman;

Transportation Security & Infrastructure Protection led by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee;

Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science & Technology led by Congressman Jim Langevin;

Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response, led by Congressman Henry Cuellar; and

Management, Investigation & Oversight led by Congressman Chris Carney.

In closing, let me say that it is impossible to say with any certainty what issues will arise two, three or even, ten months down the road.

But together we can use the resources of our institutions and the determination of the private sector, academia, non-profits and government to deliver the Real Deal.