

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Examining the Impact of Equipment Shortages on the National Guard's Readiness for Homeland Security Missions”**

May 24, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Management, Investigations, and Oversight Subcommittee hearing entitled “Examining the Impact of Equipment Shortages on the National Guard's Readiness for Homeland Security Missions”:

“Ensuring that the National Guard is equipped and ready for its homeland security missions is not just of interest to certain geographical regions, political affiliations, religions, or creeds. As Hurricane Katrina taught us, disasters happen often without much warning and they do not discriminate in their destructive nature.

Katrina taught us tough lessons that are not easy to admit. Even the best planning and preparedness may never be enough to safeguard every innocent human life. And the loss of life, in any emergency, is never acceptable. Our emergency managers and responders carry a heavy burden that all too often goes unrecognized. So do the men and women of the National Guard.

Today, the Members of this Subcommittee will hear testimony from some of our nation's most trusted and admired public servants. The men and women of the National Guard, our first military responders. I'd like to take a moment to commend General Blum and his staff for their commitment to our nation's security and in particular for working as a partner with this Committee to better secure America.

Today's hearing is the second in a series that this Committee will hold to examine the relationship between military organizations such as the National Guard and the homeland security missions they are increasingly being relied on to support. We have already heard from previous testimony that the National Guard today finds itself at a very tough crossroad, pursuing two very important and very different missions, one overseas, and one here at home.

No matter what your political beliefs about the Wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, certain facts are undeniable. The conflicts abroad have left our citizen-soldiers at home without enough working equipment and stretched far too thin. I look forward to working with my colleagues on this Committee to empower our first responders regardless of the uniform they wear.

Men and women in camouflage, FEMA windbreakers, civilian clothing, and fire gear all have something in common. They all come from our communities, serve our communities, and they all deserve our support.”

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