

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****Markup of H.Res. 404***

May 19, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup for H.Res. 404: Directing the Secretary of Homeland Security to transmit to the House of Representatives, not later than 14 days after the date of the adoption of this resolution, copies of documents relating to the Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment titled, 'Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment':

"Today, we are meeting to consider H.Res. 404, a Resolution of Inquiry seeking information from the Department of Homeland Security about the production and release of the intelligence assessment entitled, "Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment." This resolution, introduced by Ranking Member King and thirteen other Members, seeks a range of materials associated with that document.

Today, I am introducing an Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute that requests and builds upon Mr. King's resolution to ensure that the Committee is provided the materials necessary to assess how this document was produced.

When this DHS-produced assessment first surfaced in April, like many Americans, I had issues with its content. Certainly, its definition of "rightwing extremism," which did not clarify that extremist violence was the Department's true focus, raised considerable concern.

So did the suggestion that returning war veterans posed a potential threat to the homeland. That's why, on April 14, 2009, I wrote the first letter from Congress to Secretary Napolitano about this assessment.

In it, I asked for, among other things, information on the Department's clearance process for this and other assessments. I particularly wanted to know why the report focused on veterans. On April 25, 2009, the Department responded to my concerns in writing.

In her letter, Secretary Napolitano explained that DHS "does not focus on individuals or groups solely based on their First Amendment-protected associations, beliefs, or speech." She explained that the Office of Intelligence and Analysis directorate within the Department targets terrorism and other violent criminal behavior that threatens the nation.

The Secretary explained that the Department's review found that since the Department was established in 2003, there had never before been a robust clearance process for I&A intelligence products.

The clearance process that was in place, moreover, was insufficient. Specifically, she told the Committee that the assessment was disseminated by I&A without the agreement of the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. It is my understanding that a new clearance process is being established that takes into consideration the very concerns that this Committee has expressed. The Committee will look to the new I&A leadership to utilize the new clearance process going forward.

Certainly, Bart Johnson, the new Deputy Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, is

uniquely skilled to take the lead on reforming the DHS assessment process, given his extensive experience as a former Colonel with the New York State Police.

His 23 years as a New York State Trooper and most recently the DNI's Director for Homeland Security and Law Enforcement Support and Outreach, qualify him to fix I&A's broken process. He knows what intelligence the nation's first preventers need and he knows how to deliver it to State and locals.

Let the record reflect that in addition to providing a written response to my letter, Secretary Napolitano also sent representatives to brief both Majority and Minority staff on April 23, 2009. I understand the Department also provided briefings to a number of other Committees.

We appreciate the frankness of the briefers who presented to the Committee. They provided a clear description of what happened, what didn't happen, and what will be happening to make things right. Additionally, let the record also reflect that on May 8, 2009, the Department provided the Committee with source material used by I&A to develop the extremism assessment.

When this assessment surfaced, DHS had a lot to answer for. In my view, the Secretary has provided those answers and has been extremely forthcoming. More broadly, I look forward to continuing to work with the Secretary and the new I&A leadership team to help this struggling directorate turn into a vital information sharing partner with State, local and tribal law enforcement."

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