



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Over-Classification and Pseudo-Classification: The Impact on Information Sharing”

March 22, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment Subcommittee hearing entitled “Over-Classification and Pseudo-Classification: The Impact on Information Sharing”:

“Information sharing between the Federal government and its State, local and tribal partners is critical to making America safer. But we won’t get there if all we have is more and more classification, and more and more security clearances for people who need access to that classified information.

The focus should be different. The Federal government instead must do all it can to produce intelligence products that are unclassified. Unclassified intelligence frankly are the products that our first line of defense – our nation’s police officers, first responders, and private sector partners – need most. They have told me time and time again that what they *don’t* need is information about intelligence sources and methods.

An officer on patrol in Jackson, Mississippi, or Des Moines, Iowa, has no use for the name of the person in Afghanistan, Africa, or elsewhere who gave the information or whether it was obtained from an intercepted communication. What he or she wants to know is if the information is accurate, reliable and timely. If so, police chiefs and sheriffs can use it to drive their daily operations – especially when it comes to deciding where to put their people to help prevent attacks.

Indeed, that’s what intelligence is all about: if it can’t tell an officer on the beat what to prepare for and how, what good is it? Over-classification and pseudo-classification are nothing new, but 9/11 has made these problems worse.

It’s my understanding that security concerns after the September 11th attacks prompted some agencies and departments to shield whole new categories of information with Confidential, Secret or Top Secret markings. What might have started as a noble intention to protect the homeland has broken down into a system of often excessive, abusive and/or politically motivated classification decisions. It’s time to fix things.”

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