



Homeland Security

May 17, 2013

The Honorable Jeff Duncan
Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your invitation to have a DHS representative appear before the subcommittee to discuss the Department's external communications efforts, including our incident communications procedures and capabilities.

As you know, under Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5, the Secretary of Homeland Security is responsible for keeping the public informed during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response. This is a responsibility we take very seriously at DHS. During a major incident or attack, providing timely, accurate, and useful information to the American people and our Federal, state, local, and private sector partners can save lives, reduce further harm, and help mitigate additional attacks.

Building on lessons learned from the 9/11 attacks and subsequent major national incidents, the Federal government and DHS has developed strong incident communications procedures within the National Response Plan and its successor, the National Response Framework (NRF), to coordinate jointly and communicate with the American people.

As part of this effort, DHS has developed pre-arranged communications protocols for information sharing and coordination with our key communications stakeholders and counterparts. These protocols are networks that form the backbone of our coordination efforts, and have been instrumental in achieving unity of effort during major domestic incidents and events. They provide the simplified means to coordinate with the right communicators at the right time.

This system was fully engaged during the attack last month in Boston. For example, within minutes of notification of the attack, the DHS Office of Public Affairs began mobilizing its resources and our Federal incident communications processes. From April 15 to 19, DHS held three National Incident Communication Conference Line calls with key Federal, state, and local communicators, distributed 19 communications and coordination advisories or updates, and employed our Domestic Communications Strategy to provide senior Federal communicators with public communications options. These efforts provided participants with a coordinated communications path in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

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We stand ready to work with the subcommittee to identify ways to build upon and improve these procedures and capabilities, and we look forward to participating in a subcommittee hearing on this topic. Unfortunately, the appropriate Department witness, who can discuss the various topics of interest of the sub-committee, is not available during the time frame requested by the Committee. As we have discussed with your staff, we look forward to working with you to provide an appropriate witness in June to answer the full breadth of your questions regarding DHS incident communications as well as our broader external affairs efforts.

Sincerely



Nelson Peacock
Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs

cc: The Honorable Ron Barber, Ranking Member