Opening Statement of Ranking Member Tom Coburn

"Cybersecurity, Terrorism, and Beyond:
Addressing Evolving Threats to the Homeland"
Sept. 10, 2014

As prepared for delivery:

Good morning, and thank you to each of our witnesses today for their testimony. I also want to thank you for what you do, your vigilance, and the criticism you take — much of which is uninformed and undeserved.

Although I agree with Senator Carper's opening comments in many respects, where I would disagree is I do not think we are any safer today. We have a long ways to go. Based on what is happening in the world and the absolute lack of control of our border—including corruption of law enforcement along our southern border—I think the threats to and vulnerabilities of our country are just as great as they were on September 10, 2001.

The Department of Homeland Security in particular has many problems. But I know the Department has the dedicated leaders it needs now, all concentrating on the same goal of making us safer. So I am glad Secretary Johnson is there, along with General Taylor, Under Secretary Spaulding, and all the others we have confirmed through the Committee.

One of the biggest threats we face is in cybersecurity, where we have seen significant breaches both in the federal government and in the private sector. Most of them are from nation-state actors—China and Russia, specifically. And they will continue to attack us. We should not fall back from talking about what these countries are doing and why they are trying to steal our information and damage our economy. That will require all of us to work together in the cyber-realm to ensure that we reduce our vulnerability.

An important step in reducing our cybersecurity vulnerability is creating true cybersecurity information sharing between the federal government and the U.S. critical infrastructure, and between private U.S. companies. So I think it is a shame that the Senate Majority Leader will not put the bipartisan Feinstein-Chambliss cybersecurity information sharing bill on the floor. Let the Senate debate it, so we can actually start to protect our country from cyber-attacks.

These are real threats. This is an important hearing for the American people to hear—in as much detail as possible—what is going on, the threats we face, and where we need to improve.

Having the privilege of setting on both this Committee and the Select Committee on Intelligence, I get to see as well as anybody what is out there, and what everyone is doing to stop it. And everybody is working in the right direction, except the U.S. Senate. My hope would be that the Senate would start helping to improve homeland security, rather than harm in it.

So, again, I thank you all for your efforts.