

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Threats to the Homeland”
October 10, 2018

As submitted for the record:

The Committee’s mission is to enhance the economic and national security of America and promote more efficient, effective, and accountable government. The purpose of this annual hearing is to examine threats to our nation and hear from the heads of agencies responsible for securing our nation, as we work together to achieve that mission.

Our Committee has established four top priorities to focus our efforts on the threats to our homeland: border security, cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, and countering terrorism and extremism. Over the last four years, this is some of what we have learned:

Our nation’s borders remain insecure. In more than two dozen hearings, our Committee has highlighted that one of the primary root causes of our insecure border is our nation’s insatiable demand for drugs. Smugglers and traffickers continue to cross our borders, endangering public safety. Legal loopholes prevent the government from securing the border and create an incentive for people to make the dangerous journey. This problem, though widely recognized, remains unfixed because Congress refuses to act. The Committee is currently working on legislation to replace the court decision that allows families to exploit our immigration laws and makes it virtually impossible to enforce those laws without separating families.

We have held more than a dozen hearings on cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection. We learned how adversaries constantly attempt to breach government and private sector networks. Yet we know that the federal government’s own networks remain at high risk, according to the Government Accountability Office, and that more must be done to support the private sector and to deter adversaries who threaten our cybersecurity.

For critical infrastructure, the federal government continues to “admire the problem”, including the threat posed by electromagnetic pulse and geomagnetic disturbances to the nation’s electric grid. The time has come for action—including concrete steps that would help mitigate the damage resulting from a grid failure and speed restoration of power—regardless of the cause.

Through more than a dozen hearings on terrorism and extremism, the Committee has explored the evils of international terrorist groups and the ideologies that motivate them. The U.S. military, intelligence community, and international partners have had great success in combating ISIS and regaining vast amounts of territory. However, the threat posed by ISIS and other Islamic extremist terrorist organizations continues to metastasize around the world and extremist ideologies spread through increasingly more sophisticated use of information technology.

Today, we will hear from the leaders of agencies responsible for securing our nation. Secretary Nielsen will describe the Department’s work to secure the homeland. FBI Director Wray will discuss the Bureau’s approach to national security law enforcement investigations and intelligence amid current threats. Acting National Counterterrorism Center Director Travers will speak to the global terrorism threat landscape and the challenge for our nation’s security.

I thank you and the people you lead for your service, patriotism, and dedication to securing our nation. I look forward to your testimony.