

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Threats to the Homeland”
September 24, 2020

As submitted for the record:

In the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, we reshaped our homeland security apparatus to better prepare for the next attack. Now, 19 years later, as we continue to mourn those lost, we must also honor the memory of the attack by ensuring that our nation’s homeland security defenses evolve to counter an ever-changing threat landscape. Today, we will hear testimony from leaders from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the Department of Homeland Security, who are at the forefront of the fight to protect the Nation from persistent foreign and domestic threats.

In addition to traditional terrorist threats, we face growing threats of violence within our own borders. In the past four months, we have seen our nation vandalized, looted, and attacked by violent opportunists and criminals looking to exacerbate tensions and inflict harm. My home state, Wisconsin, has been especially affected by both violent rioting and civil unrest. While I strongly support the right of Americans to protest injustices, I am calling for the violence against property, law enforcement and fellow Americans to end immediately.

While we have focused our attention on violent opportunists, there has been violence perpetrated by domestic extremists from all ideological backgrounds. In addition to calling out violent rioting, we must also address the extremists who call for violence, regardless of their affiliation. Antifa, anti-government extremists and white supremacists have all exploited this nationwide unrest to promote their radical agendas and sow discord within our society.

We must remain vigilant in our fight against international Islamist terrorism and radical domestic violent extremists. Our Committee has been engaged with DHS, the FBI, and NCTC to ensure resources are being appropriately allocated based to counter foreign and domestic terrorist threats.

In addition to an evolving terrorism threat landscape, in recent years our country has had to adapt to emerging cyber and critical infrastructure related attacks. We have seen foreign adversaries target our institutions through ransomware attacks, intellectual property theft, and the spreading of disinformation in an attempt to undermine our Democracy.

As complex as these threats are, our efforts to combat them were made even more challenging as the coronavirus pandemic spread across the globe. Now adversaries not only attempt to weaponize the virus, but they are also attempting to steal intellectual property of U.S. government-funded COVID-19 vaccine development. COVID-19 has added another layer to complexity to our government’s efforts to protect and secure the homeland, as agencies work to respond to the pandemic while balancing their traditional priorities, such as border security, emergency response, and counterterrorism.

I want to thank the brave men and women in uniform for working to keep America safe. Two weekends ago we saw a horrific attack on law enforcement, when two sheriff’s deputies

were shot in the head. Almost nineteen years to the day after the September 11th terrorist attacks, it is a tragedy that this is how we now treat those who work to protect us.

I also want to thank Director Wray, Director Miller, and Mr. Cuccinelli for appearing before the Committee today and I look forward to your testimony.