

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Nomination of Chad Wolf to be Secretary of Homeland Security
August 23, 2020**

**Senator Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member
*Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery***

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to Acting Secretary Wolf for being here and for your willingness to serve.

Today we are considering the nomination of Chad Wolf to be the Secretary of Homeland Security.

Under this Administration, we have seen an unprecedented willingness to abandon the norms of Senate-confirmed Cabinet officials. This has been a particular problem at the Department of Homeland Security, our country's third largest agency, and a critical part of safeguarding our national security.

Vacancies and acting officials are a part of every administration, but should be rare. This Administration has abused vacancies to the detriment of this Department.

The President refused to formally nominate a leader for DHS for more than 500 days, a move that was not only legally questionable, but created chaos and confusion at the agency charged with addressing numerous threats to our national security.

The Department cannot successfully tackle the serious challenges it currently faces without strong, steady, and independent leadership.

While Mr. Wolf has experience at the Department, primarily as Chief of Staff, but also as an Undersecretary, and now Acting Secretary, he has been involved in some of the most controversial and concerning decisions the Department has made.

These decisions warrant a critical review of Mr. Wolf's record and call into question whether he is the right person for this crucial role.

Under Mr. Wolf's leadership, the Department has faced daunting challenges, asylum seekers at our southern border, the pandemic, civil unrest, and deadly wildfires and hurricanes. While these challenges would strain even the most prepared staff, I am concerned by reports of slow decision-making and the sidelining of experts, reports that raise serious questions about the judgment and independence of agency leaders.

I am also concerned by how the Department has failed to adequately address the rise of domestic terrorism and white supremacist violence.

As you can see from this graphic, data shows that extremism based in white nationalism, anti-Semitism, and other similar ideologies accounts for more than 75 percent of domestic terror murders in the United States.

Yet recent reports and statements of former DHS employees have indicated that the White House, in cooperation with Mr. Wolf, have downplayed this threat in public risk assessments. Rhetoric and political ideology cannot drive intelligence reports, and should not predetermine the actions of any federal department.

While the threat of domestic terror is not new, the Department's necessary shift from focusing mainly on the foreign threats that dominated the Department's origins has not been smooth. It has been 18 years since Congress passed legislation to establish this massive agency and so much has changed.

Our country faces persistent threats, both longstanding and new, including foreign and domestic terrorism, election security, natural disasters, cyber-attacks, and now a pandemic.

It is this Committee's responsibility to ensure that any nominee to lead this colossal Department has the experience, temperament, and leadership to address these threats head on, to protect the American people.

Before I wrap up my remarks, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the severe toll that the pandemic has taken on the Department of Homeland Security. Hundreds of frontline personnel have been infected while working to keep our country safe. We have also tragically lost six TSA officers to the pandemic. Our hearts go out to all of those who have suffered because of this terrible disease.

I would also like to recognize a Border Patrol agent, who is fighting for his life, after being attacked in Arizona while on duty Monday night. I wish him a speedy recovery and thank him and his fellow Border Patrol agents for the work they do to keep us all safe.

Again Mr. Wolf, thank you for your willingness to serve and for being here today to answer our questions. I look forward to having a thorough discussion about the many pressing issues facing the Department and our country.