

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Full
Committee Hearing: Threats to the Homeland**

September 24, 2020

Senator Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member

Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. While our Committee has no shortage of serious and consequential issues to tackle, our annual threats hearing is one of the most important opportunities we have to discuss how we can better safeguard our nation.

We continue to face a number of security threats, both old and new. Over the past year, since we last held this hearing, that list has only grown.

Not only do we continue to face critical threats from foreign and domestic terrorism, cyber-attacks, and efforts by foreign governments to sow chaos within our country, we are also dealing with a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic that has tragically taken the lives of over 200,000 Americans.

This public health disaster has also further exposed a significant security risk embedded in the tools we use every day to connect with the world.

As we have moved more of our daily lives online because of Coronavirus, bad actors have exploited technological weaknesses to attack the platforms we use for remote school and work.

Adversaries are working to infiltrate private companies and government agencies who are part of the critical race to find a vaccine.

Both foreign and domestic actors have also seized on misinformation and disinformation, chipping away at the fabric of our democracy, and sowing discord and mistrust in the institutions we rely on to keep us safe.

The scourge of white supremacist violence that is a long-standing issue but is now again one of the largest terrorist threats to American safety and security.

I'm alarmed that this Administration continues to downplay this threat and the root causes driving these violent ideologies.

We cannot be shortsighted when it comes to protecting our national security. As threats continue to develop and evolve – our national security agencies must be able to adapt.

We count on DHS, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the FBI to work together and provide a unified effort to defend the homeland.

As we discussed at yesterday's hearing, I am concerned that DHS has suffered because of the lack of qualified, consistent and stable leaders at the agency's helm.

While I am disappointed the Department does not believe the Acting Secretary can testify alongside his counterparts from the FBI and the National Counterterrorism Center on these important issues during his confirmation process, I am looking forward to the testimony of the three officials with us today.

Many Americans will never know the names of the thousands of personnel working tirelessly behind the scenes at your agencies to keep our country safe.

But we are all counting on you and your teams to address the known threats to our safety, and anticipate the emerging and unknown dangers our communities will face in the weeks, months, years and even decades ahead.

I'm grateful to each of you for joining us today. I look forward to hearing from you about the threats America currently faces, what your departments are doing to address those threats, and how this Committee and your agencies can continue working together to protect our national security. Thank you.