

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Gary C. Peters
Nomination Hearing
July 24, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Paul.

Throughout my time in Congress, I have heard repeatedly from my constituents – particularly from members of Michigan’s Arab and Muslim American community – about serious issues with the government’s watchlisting and travel screening practices.

While I appreciate the opportunity to discuss that today, I first want to raise concerns about some of the other critical national security work this Committee is responsible for – but unfortunately, the Chairman of this Committee has not prioritized.

In a matter of hours, two critical homeland security authorities are set to expire: cybersecurity information sharing protections that protect our economy against cyber attacks, and authorities that allow federal law enforcement to detect and mitigate threats posed by drones.

We were scheduled to discuss these two bills to renew and improve these authorities two weeks ago, but unfortunately the Chairman abruptly canceled the meeting with absolutely no explanation.

And while there is a two-month extension for both authorities included in the continuing resolution, that is only meant to be a stopgap. The Committee needs to do its work to reauthorize both of these pieces of legislation.

But even though bipartisan leaders in the House, as well as the Trump Administration and a bipartisan coalition in the Senate, all support extending this legislation for 10 years, Mr. Chairman, you have not held a single hearing on these issues, and you cancelled the only meeting where the Committee had the opportunity to discuss them. These actions risk making our nation less safe.

This committee should not simply walk away from its responsibility to actually be a leader on critical homeland security matters.

And similarly, while I share your concerns about government being weaponized for political purposes, quite frankly I find it odd that you have chosen to look backwards now that this program has ended, while at the same time President Trump is openly directing the Justice Department to prosecute his perceived enemies, by ordering also the closure of bribery investigations into a political ally who’s been investigated for taking bribes. We also recently saw the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission openly threaten the licenses of media companies over First Amendment protected speech.

Chairman, I hope you will devote this Committee's resources to conducting oversight of the current Administration as well.

Turning to today's topic: in December 2023, I published a report that demonstrated how well-intentioned screening practices have ballooned into a layered and duplicative system that sweeps up travelers who may pose no threat to national security, especially among Arab, Muslim, and South Asian American travelers.

At that time, there were at least 22 different mechanisms that could lead a traveler to receive extra screenings or be denied boarding.

Americans must navigate this complex system with no explanation of why their travel is delayed or disrupted, and they have no real opportunity to fully redress what prompted additional screening in the first place.

Congress doesn't even have a complete picture of the full scope of this system and the impact that it's had on everyday Americans.

Almost all of the oversight mechanisms are internal to the executive branch, such as the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board and the Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Office at DHS.

Unfortunately, with the Administration's attacks on oversight, those mechanisms have now been gutted, eliminating one of the few checks and balances that protect Americans' rights in this process.

That's why – following my report – I introduced, and this committee passed, the Enhanced Oversight and Accountability in Screening Act – the first real effort to provide more transparency and more oversight of this entire system of screenings.

This legislation requires DHS to reform the redress process and provide Congress with data on enhanced and secondary screenings by TSA and CBP, including their effectiveness. At the time, I asked – Mr. Chairman – you to join me in working on this legislation, but instead you and the entire Republican dais voted against this transparency legislation. I am working to update it now and would certainly love to have folks on this Committee join me in re-introducing this updated version in a bipartisan way.

As I've said countless times before, we must be able to protect our nation, but Americans who pose no threat to national security should not face a maze of travel screenings and a flawed redress process.

We must bring transparency and accountability to our travel screening practices so we can ensure the government is effectively protecting our national security, while also protecting the civil rights and civil liberties of travelers.