

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Rob Portman
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
& GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
“THREATS TO THE HOMELAND”
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Thank you, Chairman Peters, for convening this hearing. We have a lot to discuss today regarding the proliferation of historic threats facing the homeland, and the right people are here to speak about what the Administration is doing to counter those threats. I have been honored to serve on this Committee alongside Senator Peters, whom I sincerely thank for his willingness to find common ground and solve problems for the American people. I also want to extend my gratitude to David Weinberg and the rest of your staff.

Welcome, Secretary Mayorkas, Director Wray, and Director Abizaid.

As the respective leaders of your agencies, you are responsible for overseeing the career men and women of DHS, the FBI, and the National Counterterrorism Center whose mission is to safeguard our nation. This Committee is deeply appreciative of the work these patriots do to further that mission.

Every fall since the terrorist attacks on 9/11, we hold this hearing to examine America’s security challenges and discuss how we can work together to address potential and active threats. I can think of no greater priority for my last hearing as Ranking Member than to sound the alarm about our current security threats.

I will start with the growing disaster at the border.

President Biden’s failed border policy has ensured that not only our nation’s borders remain unsecure but foreign adversaries, transnational criminal organizations, and other nefarious actors know they can enter our country and threaten the safety and security of the American public with virtual impunity.

In the past year, Border Patrol apprehended more than 2 million total unlawful migrants. This is up 143 percent since 2019. And that figure does not include the number of “got-aways,” or individuals who crossed our border undetected. Criminals who traffic both humans and drugs across our border are able to do so with ease because our Border Patrol is using most of its time to process unlawful migrants into the country.

Those drugs include record levels of deadly fentanyl seizures causing record numbers of overdose deaths.

The first two years of the Biden administration have been by far the worst two years of unlawful migration and deadly drug seizures in our nation's history.

Another historic failure of the Biden Administration with regard to our nation's security was its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. Afghans who had stood with us and our allies were left behind to suffer under Taliban rule. Meanwhile, more than 36,000 Afghans with no record of ever partnering with us, some of whom have apparent ties to terrorism. Were paroled into our country without proper screening and vetting.

Despite three reports from two Inspectors General documenting the failures of DHS vetting and then paroling known or suspected terrorists into our communities, DHS continues to deny any problem. Yet, President Biden requested and received an additional \$15 million for the FBI to conduct counter-terror investigations of known or suspected terrorists among the Afghan evacuees released into our country by DHS. In other words, Director Wray is responsible for cleaning up the mess created by DHS -- so perhaps we have divergent views on this panel about this subject.

We all recognize the grave threat posed by our adversaries, such as Russia, Iran, and China, who rely on disinformation tactics to weaken our democracy. But at home, we must be much more careful around issues of domestic speech. We must respond to imminent threats of violence, but censoring constitutionally-protected speech is another matter entirely. To be precise, it is a redline.

I hope we can all agree that the United States government should not censor the speech of our own citizens. Americans' speech, differences of opinion, and political viewpoints are not a threat to democracy, but rather a bedrock of it.

We know now that while DHS disbanded its disturbing Disinformation Governance Board after significant public outcry, it has continued its efforts to curb speech under the guise of countering mis- or dis-information. The entanglement of the FBI and DHS with social media platforms for the purposes of controlling narratives is of deep concern.

Recent reports allege that DHS is colluding with Big Tech to moderate content in a way that conforms with the Biden administration's politically-skewed viewpoint including on the Afghanistan withdrawal and the origin of Covid.

Our democracy is also under threat because Congress and the Administration have been unwilling to confront the systematic theft of US intellectual property by China which is undermining our national security and economic security. To those who believe that research security is not important, I will remind you the recent comments by Director Wray said “there is no country that presents a broader, more severe threat to our innovation, our ideas, and our economic security than China.” I couldn’t agree more.

Every day, China reinforces the findings of our various investigations, showing the staggering extent of the Chinese Government’s efforts to conduct influence and espionage operations in our country, and to steal American technology, research, and information for their own military and economic benefit. Addressing this threat is more urgent than ever and yet the Safeguarding American Innovation Act, which was reported out of this Committee, has been blocked from becoming law because of the unwillingness of Congress to confront this issue.

Cyberattacks are another significant issue facing every sector of our country. They are a force multiplier for our adversaries, who understand our economic and security dependence on technology. Compounding that problem is the inherent difficulty of attributing cyberattacks to specific nation-states or criminal groups.

Terrorism and targeted violence also remain serious threats to our nation. This year, an Islamist terrorist gained entry to the United States and attacked a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas. In a separate incident, an Ohio-based Islamic State operative plotted to assassinate former President Bush.

I remain concerned about the threat posed by foreign terrorist organizations, especially in the wake of our hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda continues to pose a threat to the United States. The Islamic State continues to expand and mobilize. Iranian-sponsored Shi’a terrorist groups target key U.S. interests and government officials. We must remain vigilant as these terrorist organizations regroup and evolve.

We must restore confidence in the American public that we’re committed to protect this nation from terrorism, espionage, and other homeland security threats. This effort should be bipartisan. We all have the same goal, a safe, secure American homeland.

With that said, I look forward to your testimony, but most importantly, your responses to our questions regarding your record addressing these threats. I will note that only last week did we finally receive overdue answers to questions from

last year's hearing. I hope this Committee will receive prompt responses this time around.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.