

**Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“The Impact of ISIS on the Homeland and Refugee Resettlement”**

Thursday, November 19, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Last month, the leaders of the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and the National Counterterrorism Center testified before this committee regarding threats to the homeland — including the growing threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. Since then ISIS has shown us exactly what it is capable of.

Three weeks ago, a Russian Airbus A321 airliner was blown out of the sky as it left Egypt — killing 224 men, women and children. ISIS claimed responsibility. Last week, we watched in horror as multiple terrorist attacks occurred in different parts of the world — killing at least 37 and injuring 181 in Beirut and killing at least 129 and injuring 352 in Paris. Again ISIS claimed responsibility.

The horrific atrocities of ISIS clearly affect homeland security. More and more domestic plots appear to be inspired or motivated directly by ISIS or by its propaganda. Despite this, it appears that the president remains committed to admitting up to 10,000 Syrian refugees next year. Barring a change in the law, which is unlikely, the president has the legal authority to do this and will likely proceed. I believe it is this committee's responsibility to protect national security by ensuring that the vetting process for these refugees is thorough, complete and not short-circuited in any way.

We must consider both the possible risks associated with Syrian refugees and the other dangers the United States may face from Islamic terrorists. Today, we will analyze the vulnerabilities in the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program but also those in the Visa Waiver Program and at our southwest and northern borders.

This committee knows better than most: Our borders are not secure. At a hearing examining the northern border, we heard that if you get into Canada, you will be able to reach the United States. Canada has announced that it will streamline its vetting process to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of the year. This raises the question: Are Syrian refugees coming in through Canada an even greater risk?

Testimony at other hearings revealed that we are interdicting only 5 to 10 percent of illegal drugs that are brought across our southwest border and that we may be catching as little as 30 to 40 percent of illegal immigrants. On Tuesday, it was reported that five Syrians were apprehended in Honduras who were making their way to the United States. During a trip to Central America last month, committee members heard that Hondurans catch "special interest aliens"[1] transiting their country on their way to the United States every single day.

The Paris attacks also highlight the vulnerabilities in the Visa Waiver Program. Most of the Paris attackers were nationals of countries in our Visa Waiver Program. We do not yet know

whether they could have come to the United States without a visa. What we do know is that there are between 5,000 to 8,000 known foreign fighters that originate from countries where the Visa Waiver Program would apply.

I am grateful to have two distinguished panels of leading experts here today to answer important questions about how we vet refugees before allowing them into our country, about what happens to the refugees once they arrive, and whether ISIS is likely to utilize our refugee resettlement program and other vulnerabilities to its tactical advantage.

I thank the witnesses for appearing today, and I look forward to your testimony regarding the very serious challenges we face.

[1] The term “Special Interest Alien” originated after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks and refers to individuals from countries associated with terrorism. See Sylvia Longmire, *What Can We Learn From Trends in ‘Special Interest Alien’ Migration Into the U.S.*, Homeland Security Today.US (May, 11, 2011), <http://www.hstoday.us/briefings/correspondents-watch/single-article/what-can-we-learn-from-trends-in-special-interest-alien-migration-into-the-us/dde14d2e6e96cdb40a5ae5003d4002f2.html>.