

**Chairman Johnson Opening Statement**  
**“Front-Line Response to Terrorism in America”**

**Tuesday, February 2, 2016**

*As submitted for the record:*

Good morning and welcome.

Just last week, federal, state and local authorities worked together successfully to thwart an apparent terrorist attack on a Masonic center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was a reminder of the serious threats we face in the United States in 2016.

Over the past year, terrorist attacks have occurred in communities across America—including in Boston, Massachusetts; Garland, Texas; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and San Bernardino, California. A number of other attacks poised to cause mass casualties were thwarted by federal, state and local authorities. U.S. authorities reported a high number of terrorism-related arrests last year — in fact, the most since 2001.

The threat is real. It is growing. And it can happen anywhere.

As chairman, my main focus is to help ensure that the federal government is fulfilling its first responsibility: to keep our nation safe and protect the American people.

It will require hard and effective work by federal, state and local authorities to identify extremists and disrupt terrorism plots before they occur, as they did in Milwaukee last week.

The American people will need to do their part too. This includes staying alert and reporting suspicious behavior to law enforcement authorities.

Unfortunately, we are learning the very difficult and tragic lesson that we will not be able to prevent every terrorist plot in the United States. And when terrorist attacks and other horrific crimes do occur, local first responders are the first to arrive at the scene and coordinate to secure the area, clear the building, and eliminate the threat. These heroes put their lives on the line each day to protect the American public.

We are fortunate to have a diverse panel of state and local witnesses with us today who can speak to the local response during recent attacks. We will also hear what police, fire and emergency service personnel in communities across America are doing to prepare for the next attack. Earlier this year, I traveled across Wisconsin on a national security listening tour to hear directly from local first responders and citizens. I would like to extend a special welcome to Chief Sparks, who attended one of those sessions and is bringing that message to Washington today.

It is my hope that this discussion will help us draw lessons learned about what first responders in communities across the country can do to save lives after terrorist attacks.

I also want to draw on the experience of our witnesses to help us understand how we can work together better to prevent terrorism:

For example, how can we improve our information sharing programs and operations? Our front lines of defense — state and local authorities — need to have all the information available to stop terrorist attacks.

How can we ensure better cooperation and collaboration between law enforcement agencies on terrorism investigations to prevent attacks? We can't afford silos. We can't afford not to work together.

We have made progress in these areas since 2001. But to address the serious and growing threat of violent extremism in the months and years ahead, we will need to do better.

I thank each of you for being willing to testify today. And, more importantly, thank you for your service on behalf of the American people.