

**Chairman Johnson Opening Statement
“The Security of U.S. Visa Programs”**

Tuesday, March 15, 2016

As submitted for the record:

Good morning. Thank you for joining us today.

Last December, the United States experienced the worst domestic terrorist attack since Sept. 11, 2001, when Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tafsheen Malik, opened fire on an office holiday party in San Bernardino, Calif. — killing 14 and wounding 22.

Malik had immigrated to the United States legally from Saudi Arabia in 2014 on a fiancée visa, after reportedly meeting Farook on the Internet.

This horrific attack reminded us of the grave danger we face if we allow the wrong people to enter the country. It is a reminder of why the security of our visa program is so important.

In response to this attack, last year Congress and the Obama administration joined together to enact reforms to strengthen the Visa Waiver Program, through legislation that I and others sponsored.

Reforming the Visa Waiver Program represented a real improvement to our national security — requiring enhanced screening of foreign nationals who had traveled to certain countries like Iraq and Syria. But these improvements are premised on the integrity and security of the U.S. visa system and the traditional screening process.

With millions of people applying for visas to come to the United States, we face a daunting challenge: vetting the applications, screening and interviewing the foreign nationals, and, if they are granted a visa, ensuring that they follow the law and terms of their visas.

This is a challenge that dates back to 2001 and the Sept. 11 attacks. The bipartisan 9/11 Commission warned us that the al-Qaida hijackers defeated our immigration system, and that immigration security was critical for national security.

Now, 15 years later, the security of our immigration system is more critical than ever — particularly given the growth and spread of Islamic extremist terrorist organizations across the world and the rise in ISIS-inspired attacks on our own soil.

The purpose of our hearing this morning is to examine the state of visa security and to answer the following questions:

First, are we doing all that we can to screen and vet visa applicants before they enter the country?

Second, how effectively are federal agencies managing their responsibilities and working together — including sharing information — through each step of the visa and immigration process to ensure our security?

I am particularly interested to understand how the DHS components represented here today are working together — including overseeing key visa programs, sharing information, and preventing fraud and national security threats.

The American people are counting on us to keep them safe. That depends on the security and integrity of our immigration system. It requires the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security, as well as their components, to work effectively together as one team to protect us.

I am pleased that we have representatives from the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security with us today to address these serious questions.

You each have important jobs and responsibilities. I look forward to your testimony.