

Opening Statement of Chairman Johnson
“Fifteen Years After 9/11: Threats to the Homeland”
September 27, 2016

As submitted for the record:

Fifteen years have passed since September 11, 2001. Today, the threat of militant Islamic terrorist attacks to the United States remains significant.

Over the past year, Americans have suffered attacks inspired by Islamic Terrorism in San Bernardino, Orlando, Columbus, Philadelphia, and—most recently, the vicious attack in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and the bombings in New York and New Jersey.

In all, Islamic extremist terrorist have killed 63 people on U.S. soil since our committee last held its annual hearing to consider threats to the homeland and heard testimony from the heads of the FBI, DHS, and National Counterterrorism Center. And this does not count the horrific attacks that occurred in Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Two years after the President stated his goal of defeating ISIS, we have made little progress. As CIA Director Brennan told Congress in June, “our efforts have not reduced the group’s terrorism capability and global reach.” We need stronger American leadership.

There is no question that there are terrorists, rogue nations, and other criminal elements that want to harm this nation.

As Chairman of this Committee, through our hearings and oversight work, I have investigated vulnerabilities in our border, aviation, maritime, visa, cyber, and critical infrastructure security, and where possible I have worked on bipartisan legislation to address these threats.

Here is what I have learned about our nation’s vulnerabilities:

Our borders are not secure.

I am concerned that our system for vetting people coming to this country is not air tight, allowing potential adversaries to enter the country.

Federal agencies, and even components within DHS, are not always effectively working together—including in the aftermath of the San Bernardino attacks—which undermines our ability to prevent or respond to attacks.

Weaknesses remain in the security of our nation’s critical infrastructure and cybersecurity.

According to whistleblowers within DHS, I just learned that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is working to naturalize as many citizens as possible before the election, rather than focusing on weaknesses in the current system that put our security at risk.

As Chairman of this Committee, I have worked to address these weaknesses, through oversight and bipartisan legislation. Our Committee has passed legislation to improve our border security, prevent human trafficking, enhance cybersecurity, and reform and strengthen Department of Homeland Security.

In all, we have passed 28 bills through our committee to improve our nation's security. Nine of these bills have become law and 11 have passed the Senate. Unfortunately, due to politics, some of our most important bills are being held up.

For example, our Committee has passed the DHS Accountability Act, which is significant reform legislation to improve the Department of Homeland Security. Today, I ask Secretary Johnson to publicly support our legislation, so that we can ask Senator Reid and others who are blocking the legislation to allow it to move forward to improve our nation's security.

I am concerned that the security threats facing our country are evolving and growing more serious by the day. We must all work together to continue addressing homeland security threats and strengthening our defenses. The American people are counting on us.