

“S. 2836, the Preventing Emerging Threats Act of 2018: Countering Malicious Drones”
Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
June 6, 2018

This Committee has a tradition of working together in a bipartisan manner to provide the federal government with the authorities it needs to protect the American people. All too often we pass reactive legislation in the wake of a terrorist attack or other security incident. The purpose of this hearing is to proactively address an emerging threat.

Today’s hearing will focus on the emerging threat that drones in the hands of malicious actors could pose to public safety, and examine bipartisan legislation that Senators McCaskill, Hoeven, Heitkamp, Jones, Cotton, Cassidy, Rubio and I have offered to provide authority to the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to help protect us from that threat.

Unmanned aircraft systems, or drones, can be used by adversaries in a number of ways to harm or threaten public safety. As is the case when discussing any potential threats, I am wary of providing too much information publicly that could be used by those that want to do us harm. But it should come as no surprise that extremists and criminals both at home and abroad continue to develop drone technology to use for malign purposes. Traffickers use drones to conduct surveillance or smuggle illegal drugs into our country. Criminals use drones to smuggle weapons and other contraband into secure areas including federal prisons. Terrorists use drones to execute their evil attacks against innocent civilians.

The number of drone incidents reported by federal agencies – for example drone flights over sensitive areas or suspicious activities – has skyrocketed from 8 incidents in 2013 to an estimated 1,752 incidents in 2016. The technology is not only constantly evolving, but is getting cheaper and easier to buy off the shelf and manipulate.

I am concerned that the federal government does not have the legal authorities it needs to protect the American public from these kinds of threats. The threats posed by malicious drones are too great to ignore. It is not enough to simply tell operators of unmanned aircraft not to fly in certain areas; we must give federal law enforcement the authority to act if necessary.

S. 2836, the *Preventing Emerging Threats Act of 2018*, would give the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice the authority they need to protect certain assets and facilities where drones would pose an unacceptable security risk to the public. The bill provides these authorities while still protecting recreational drone use. By providing a five-year sunset provision, Congress would have an opportunity to revisit and refine the authorities prior to that sunset.

Thank you to our witnesses from across the administration for joining us today and for the work you all do to keep us safe. We appreciate your dedication to our nation’s security and look forward to working with you to protect the American people against these emerging threats.