

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Rob Portman
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
“DOMESTIC TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: EXAMINING THE
THREAT OF RACIALLY, ETHNICALLY, RELIGIOUSLY,
AND POLITICALLY MOTIVATED ATTACKS, PART I.”
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AS PREPARED

Thank you, Chairman Peters, for holding this hearing to examine the persistent and concerning threat posed by domestic terrorists and violent extremists. This is a threat to communities across our country. Today, we will hear from representatives of certain communities about the violence they have experienced. While I am looking forward to hearing their testimony, it is important that we recognize all communities that have been impacted by domestic terrorism and violent extremism. Not all of whom are represented here today.

It is also important to recognize the threat of all types of domestic terrorism. One domestic terrorism threat listed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation that we won't hear about today is eco-terrorism. Just in the past week, we've come to learn more about eco-terrorism on the Senate floor in the context of a Biden Administration nominee to run the Bureau of Land Management.

Domestic terrorists and violent extremists are not new phenomena, nor are the methods used to advance their causes. As Chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, I held a hearing in July of 2016 examining foreign terrorists' use of the internet and social media platforms for radicalization and recruitment.

That hearing was also aimed at understanding the threat and how the federal government was and should be addressing the threat. And we heard directly from witnesses at the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the State Department. I'm disappointed that we will not hear testimony today from a single

government official about how the federal government is addressing the domestic terrorism and violent extremism threat.

Each of the witnesses at the July 2016 Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations hearing highlighted the challenges we face in combatting terrorism and violent extremism in the age of the internet, including:

- the reality that the digital environment often accelerates recruitment and radicalization efforts; and
- the speed with which individuals online can mobilize to violence — often referred to as the “flash-to-bang effect.”

Five years later, we are still seeing the same weapons being used within our own communities, and we are also increasingly seeing many domestic violent actors connecting with and learning from foreign groups and individuals. Domestic terrorists and violent extremists, inspired by a range of ideological beliefs on the left and the right, are increasingly using digital platforms to spread hate and incite violence here at home.

As Americans, we value our first amendment rights, including the right to express our beliefs, but nothing gives someone a right to carry out acts of violence.

We must also acknowledge recent acts of violence in the form of assaults on government, specifically, law enforcement. Violent extremists from all segments of the ideological spectrum are increasingly targeting the military, law enforcement, and government personnel. That is why I wrote a letter to the Department of Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas in May requesting information on what the Department is doing to deter and combat these violent attacks. Any attack on our nation’s law enforcement is an attack on the rule of law and on our American ideals.

The safety and security of our communities has been a key priority for me. After the Pittsburgh Tree of Life tragedy in October of 2018, I brought together leaders of faith-based groups and non-profit entities

from across Ohio for a Faith Security Conference in Columbus to discuss how to best respond to threats.

What I said at that Conference and what I reaffirm today, is that Congress *can*, and *should*, do more, and I redoubled our efforts to provide communities with the resources needed to protect themselves from acts of violence. I've worked to establish and support the Department of Homeland Security's Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which allows nonprofits to apply for funds they can use to secure their facilities. Last year, my bipartisan *Protecting Faith-Based and Nonprofit Organizations from Terrorism Act* with Chairman Peters was signed into law, which authorized \$75 million annually for five years, for this Grant Program.

Further, in wake of recent violence against religious communities, I sponsored the bipartisan *Pray Safe Act* with Senators Hassan, Johnson, Rounds, Peters, and Rosen to establish a federal clearinghouse so that faith-based entities can access safety and security best practices, available federal grant programs, and training opportunities. The threats and senseless attacks on all faith-based organizations and houses of worship must stop, but in the interim I urge my colleagues to support this important bipartisan legislation.

Let me be clear: there is no place for hatred or bigotry of any kind toward our fellow citizens. In confronting these challenges, we must take a holistic look at the threats. Today's witnesses will speak to this topic. We also need to hear and learn from government witnesses, who are not here today, about the magnitude of the threat and how the federal government is responding to it. Only after hearing these relevant perspectives can we develop a comprehensive strategy to combat these troubling threats.

I appreciate the witnesses being here today. I look forward to your insights and perspectives, but most importantly, your ideas on how we can better combat terrorism and violent extremism in our country so that we can learn what more Congress can and should do to counter these threats. Thank you.