

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**  
**“Threats to the Homeland”**

**OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS**  
**NOVEMBER 5, 2019**  
**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

The Department of Homeland Security was created to defend the United States from any and all threats to the safety of our nation. The Department and its leaders are critical to our national security efforts, and we rely on them to effectively coordinate with both the National Counterterrorism Center and the FBI to provide a unified effort to defend the homeland.

When DHS was first created, in the aftermath of 9/11, the agency’s mission was clear – combat the scourge of international terrorism and ensure that we could say with confidence: never again.

But over time, that narrow focus has expanded, as the threats to our homeland have grown and become more dynamic.

New terrorist groups devoted to striking America and our allies have emerged.

Foreign adversaries and cyber criminals seek to infiltrate and disrupt the nation’s cyber networks, posing an asymmetric threat that could cripple our economy with the click of a button.

Foreign interference in our domestic affairs has presented a complicated new challenge that we are still scrambling to adequately address.

A rise in domestic terrorism, specifically acts of violence carried out by white supremacist extremists, has targeted racial and religious minority communities across the country.

Every year, we hold this hearing to examine these and other threats facing our country and to hear from the heads of the agencies responsible for keeping Americans safe.

The safety of Americans is built on partnership – partnership between our security agencies here today, partnership between agency leadership and their staff, and partnership between Congress and the Administration.

As we convene this hearing without a Secretary of Homeland Security, Acting or otherwise, I am deeply concerned these partnerships are unravelling. The absence of steady leadership at the Department of Homeland Security is a driving force for institutional breakdowns that risk making us all less safe.

The Department needs, and the American people deserve, qualified, consistent and stable leadership that will empower the brave women and men at DHS to protect the homeland, respond to natural disasters, and allow our nation to grow and prosper.

This Committee will continue to exercise thorough oversight of your departments’ efforts to ensure that communities are protected from these threats. But that requires cooperation from your agencies and your compliance with Constitutionally-mandated oversight requests.

I am extremely disappointed in your agencies' failures to provide a sufficient, or in the case of the FBI, any, response to bipartisan requests from this Committee about the growing threat of domestic terrorism and white supremacist violence.

No one should live in fear of being attacked in their neighborhoods or in their houses of worship. This is a serious and growing threat, one we must address in order to save lives and to protect the very core of what makes us a free, diverse, and vibrant people.

I am grateful that your departments have taken the important step of presenting a framework for addressing this threat. But we cannot stop with a simple acknowledgement or a strategy put onto paper. This threat is not theoretical, and neither should be our response.

I insist that you comply with our outstanding, bipartisan requests immediately as Congress works to combat the very real threat of domestic terrorism.

This Committee and your agencies must work together to review the policies and actions needed to keep Americans safe and ensure they are successful.

I'm grateful to each of you for joining us today. I look forward to hearing from you about the threats America currently faces, what your departments are doing to address those threats, and how this Committee and your agencies can continue working together to protect our national security.

Thank you.