

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
“Oversight of DHS Personnel Deployments to Recent Protests”**

**OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS**

**August 6, 2020**

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Acting Secretary Wolf, thank you for being here today. I know you have an awful lot on your plate and I appreciate that time is precious.

You have a challenging role, especially in these unprecedented times. Nevertheless, I am extremely disappointed in recent actions DHS has taken under your leadership. Actions that put at risk your ability to effectively protect the homeland.

I do not dispute that the situation in Portland required a response.

We cannot allow a small number of bad actors who want to instigate violence, or harm law enforcement personnel, take advantage of peaceful demonstrators exercising their First Amendment rights.

However, DHS’s chosen response to the situation on the ground is unacceptable. Instead of working together with state and local partners, you sent a surge of federal personnel who did not have the proper training to deescalate the situation.

Your heavy-handed tactics caused additional chaos and I am concerned this singular focus on protecting federal property is distracting the Department from addressing the threat posed by domestic terrorism.

Last year at my urging, this Committee held the Senate’s first-ever hearing focused on white supremacist violence and domestic terrorism threats.

We have seen far too many attacks in this country at the hands of white supremacist terrorists. Attacks that have taken the lives of far too many Americans.

When Americans were murdered in shopping centers or while at worship by domestic terrorists with ties to white supremacist movements, your Department failed to respond with the same urgency we saw on the streets of Portland.

When one Federal Protective Services officer was tragically murdered and another was seriously wounded in the line of duty earlier this year – it was by Americans with ties to the Boogaloo Boys. A movement rooted in white nationalism.

Yet you still have not released a complete plan to combat white supremacist violence nearly a year after the long delayed release of the “Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence.”

I want to know why your agency is not focusing on the threat posed by white supremacist violence in our country with the same sense of urgency.

I want to know why your own Office of Intelligence and Analysis has no trouble sharing intelligence on journalists with police in Portland but makes excuses for not being able keep tabs on suspected domestic terrorists who frequent white nationalist forums online.

The Department of Homeland Security and decisions made to keep our communities safe should not be or ever be driven by politics.

Terrorism is terrorism whether it fits the ideological narrative of DHS leaders or not. DHS must never let politics define, limit, or overshadow the truth about the security risks to our country.

Instead of aligning your Department’s resources, personnel, and mission to tackle the white supremacist terrorist threat you have chosen to focus on optics.

I know that our law enforcement personnel put their lives on the line every time they go to work. I have fought hard in Congress to make sure they have the resources they need to stay safe in the line of duty.

But let me be crystal clear, the decisions this Administration has made in recent months have put DHS personnel at unnecessary risk. And because you chose to escalate conflicts, you not only risked your officers’ safety, you risked the safety of American civilians.

Now more than ever we need leadership at the Department of Homeland Security.

We need coordination with state and local officials.

We need to be focused on the most prevalent and deadly threats facing our nation.

I continue to hope the Department can juggle its complex missions. But what I have seen so far calls into serious question this Administration’s priorities when it comes to national security.

I look forward to speaking with you further today and continuing to work together to protect our national security and the American people.